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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[HOPE LIFTED HER TEAR-STAINED FACE—SORROW AND JOY MINGLED TOGETHER IN HER EYES.]

HER MISTAKE.

CHAPTER III.

HOPE passed a restless, and almost miserable night. She fell into short, broken sleeps, only to wake with a start, and sit up in bed, her heart beating wildly, and her limbs trembling. Then she would lie down again, and her senses would fade into a jumble of ideas. Brenda's cold, grey eyes and sharp voice were always in these brief dreams; and then Hugh Christie's brown orbs seemed to be full of reproach. Then she was standing on the edge of a precipice, and below her was the struggling, writhing form of an injured man, whose moans rent her tender heart, and whose sufferings made her nerves thrill; and throughout the dream she could hear this man crying out that hope was dead, that life was over for him, for he could never hope again!

The girl was sensitive, delicately organised beyond description, and the events of the preceding evening made a great impression on her. She had not known, until now, how

much pleasure she had derived from seeing Captain Christie, or how much store she had set on this visit of his to Thickthorn.

She knew she had always liked him. Last winter, when he had come for the hunting, and she had followed him across country and over many a stiff "bit," Hope had been on laughing and merry good terms with the young man; but last winter she had been Hope the school-girl, and now she was Miss Carruthers, and a year had made a great deal of difference all round. She had never been so shy with Captain Christie last year; she had never flushed hotly when he spoke to her, nor drooped her heavy lashes beneath the warmth of his gaze. It was all strange and new to her, and she did not understand the real meaning for the moment. She only knew that she would rather inflict the greatest pain on herself than let him suffer any, and there was a perpetual pang through her heart as she recalled the sight of him sauntering past the piano; too hurt, apparently, to give her even a glance or a smile. She was lying wide awake on her frilled pillows when Dicky burst unceremoniously into her room.

"Snow a foot deep!" he announced, swinging himself on to the end of the bedstead. "Dobson is in a wax, I can tell you, and they say he's off his head!"

"Who? Dobson?" Hope asked, with a fleeting smile.

"No. The chap who's hurt—had delirium or something funny last night. I say, Hope, aren't you going to get up? It's ever so late!" Hope turned her lovely head languidly on the pillow.

"I'm so tired!" she said plaintively.

Dicky looked at her sharply.

"You're as pale as a ghost. I say, don't go and get ill, Hope, there's a good chap. Things are likely to be precious gloomy as it is. I wonder if this will stop our dance to-morrow night?"

Jecks coming in at this moment routed Master Dicky from his perch.

"I won't have Miss Hope woke up at an unearthly hour, and that's flat, Master Richard!" she declared firmly.

"Oh, lor, it's just sickening," exclaimed Dick, in high dudgeon. "What on earth do

you suppose a fellow's to do in this beastly weather?"

"Go and help sweep the snow from the front terrace!" was Jecks' reply.

Dick gave a howl of delight.

"Crikey! I never thought of that! Good old Jecks, you're a cner, and no mistake!"

"Master Dick, Master Dick!" Away flew Jecks after her boy. "Put on your coat and scarf and your goloshes, my dear."

"Oh, hang the goloshes!" shouted Dick, disappearing down the stairs with kangaroo bounds.

Hope laughed at Jecks' dismay; but her merriment did not last long. She felt tired and depressed, and her face had a pale, wistful air that enhanced rather than detracted from her beauty, as she went down to breakfast.

Brenda, in the smartest and tightest of tailor-made gowns, glanced at the girl sharply and with satisfaction.

"If her heart is touched she is in for a good time presently," she said to herself.

Brenda was not easily deceived, and she read Hugh Christie's mind perfectly. His pecuniary condition had long been known to her. Indeed, there was very little about Captain Christie she had not studied.

"You look bilious this morning, Hope!" she said, as she stood behind the superb old silver urns, and manipulated the distribution of tea and coffee.

"It's this horrid snow!" Hope's cousin, Clare Leighton, said, quickly. "It makes everyone feel ill. Only I wish it would make my cheeks as becoming as yours, Hope, darling! You are white, while I am green. Aren't I, Freddy?"

As Freddy Druce was her fiancé, and simply adored Miss Leighton, his answer was by no means a corroboration of this statement.

Brenda bit her lip. She had no liking for Clare Leighton, who treated her in a markedly cold manner, and paid Hope all the attention she considered due to the daughter of the house.

"I—I don't think I am ill, and I like the snow," Hope said, valiantly, and the ready colour flushed into her cheeks. It was not easy to be cool when those brown eyes opposite were gazing at her so steadfastly.

"No accounting for tastes," Brenda said, with a light laugh, and then she kissed most affectionately two girls, who entered the breakfast room.

They were neighbours of Thickthorn Manor, and being poor and worldly had been glad to worship at the shrine of Miss Grant's money, and pay her the homage and attention she craved.

"What are we to do with ourselves this morning?" Brenda asked of the company generally. "I am open to any suggestions."

A dozen different things were discussed, but of them all Brenda accepted only Captain Christie's idea.

"An impromptu concert is the best thing in the world!" she declared.

"With the negro songs and choruses," Hugh added, strangling a yawn.

This snow was an awful bore in his eyes; he had come to Thickthorn for the hunting as much as anything else, and the visions of several long days confined to the house was not inviting. Moreover, he felt that any amusement he might have had in flirting with Hope was not to be, as the result would be more dangerous than he had bargained for.

"And with breakdowns, of course," suggested Mr. Druce. "I know you can dance as well as any nigger impersonator, Christie."

"We must have a platform and an orchestra. Let me see, where shall we go?" Brenda mused, wrinkling her brow, and not looking particularly pretty during the operation. "The blue drawing-room will be the best. I will ring and have fires put there immediately!"

Hope coloured, and then grew pale again. The blue drawing-room had been the apartment sacred to her dead mother, and by Sir

William's orders it had remained untouched and unoccupied all these past years.

Brenda had often sneered at the sentiment that had given rise to this order; and now and then she had endeavored to establish her supremacy above the living master and the dead mistress by discussing and arranging some plans in connection with this particular room.

Up to the present time, however, she had attacked this matter only slightly, as to gain more power over Sir William was but a very small affair, also Brenda's natural meanness always shrank from more expense than was absolutely necessary, and as the room would require, at least, a few hundreds spent on it to make it modern and fashionable, she had let the subject rest.

There had always been the sort of malicious pleasure in remembering that it would be a source of annoyance, probably pain, to Hope at some future date, and Brenda was content to wait for this.

The idea of using the room to-day came all of a sudden into her mind. Clare Leighton's quick championship of her cousin, added to the fact that Hugh Christie's eyes were speaking too well their keen admiration of Hope's beauty; that was increased and intensified by the sad, wistful look upon it, had aroused up all Brenda's old jealousy for her step-sister, and all belonging to her. It was out of the savage desire to let Hope feel her power that the idea of using Lady Sybil's room occurred to her.

There was something particularly amusing and satisfactory to turn this apartment, hallowed by tender memories and sweet thoughts, into a sort of impromptu music-hall, and decorate its long, unbroken silence with comic songs and negro breakdowns.

Brenda turned to one of the footmen.

"Kindly inform Mrs. Carmichael I desire fires to be lit in the blue drawing-room immediately; also that she is to send some maids in at once to sweep it and dust it, and make it decent. I am afraid ladies and gentlemen—this with a little laugh—that I shall have to apologise for the room. It has not been used for some time and as to the piano, well—we must have one carried out of one of the other rooms, unless you have a fancy for a spinet!"

Clare Leighton had flushed crimson. Sir William had come in hurriedly, and was busy exchanging greetings with those at the end of his table. He did not catch what was going on. Hope gave one glance at him, then bit her lip tremulously, and then spoke, not quite steadily yet gently, and with dignity.

"Don't you think, Brenda, dear," she said, her lovely eyes going direct to her sister's head, with its somewhat meagre hair, dressed and curled and twisted in the last and most immaculate fashion, "we should be more comfortable in one of the other rooms?"

Brenda smiled, and her heart beat a little more quickly. She was only too delighted to see Hope roused into action. Half her unkind and spiteful tricks against the girl lost in value by reason of Hope's proud, quiet submission. This change of manner was so Brenda a welcome change.

"No, Hope, dear," she answered, with a sneer on the word. "I don't think so."

"The blue drawing-room has been shut up so long," Hope said, gaining courage by a glance at her cousin's sympathetic face. "I am afraid it will be cold and damp, especially on such a day, and everybody will suffer in consequence."

"There are two fireplaces, I believe—we have plenty of coal!" Brenda replied, with that vulgarity which would assert itself every now and then.

Hugh Christie shivered at her words and tone. "She is a pill, despite the gilding," he said, to himself. He did not know what the real matter was that lay beneath the surface of this slight passage of arms between Hope and her step-sister, but he felt that it was some-

thing that touched the girl's heart, and his sympathy was all for her.

"Poor, delicate little dove, how beautiful she is! Why the deuce is the world so crooked. Now if she had these thousands," he checked himself suddenly. "It is a pretty picture, but, like most pretty pictures, an impossible one. The less I look at it the better."

Clare Leighton's annoyance found a vent in words.

"I am sure, Brenda," she said hotly, "that if you stop, and think for one moment you will see Hope is right in this matter."

Brenda laughed easily, but her nondescript complexion assumed a red hue, nevertheless.

"Dear me, what a fuss all about nothing! It is a shame to discuss these domestic details before everybody; they are so dull and so unimportant! And, really, I need trouble no one about them!"

Hope's face flashed and paled.

"I hope you understand I do not wish to interfere, Brenda," she said, quietly. "But for many reasons I think it would be wiser to hold our concert in some other room."

Brenda bit her lip.

"I have given the necessary orders, and there is an end of the matter!"

Sir William caught the last words.

"What's amiss?" he asked, hurriedly, his handsome, good-natured face glowering over at signs of a storm. "What is the matter with my fairy?"

Hope's head was bent, and with difficulty she restrained her tears.

"Your fairy is very foolish," Brenda called out lightly, and with apparent good-humour. "She wants to overtax her capabilities, Sir William. Please tell her she is not strong enough to undertake any of the domestic duties!"

Clare Leighton lost her patience and her temper. She came of a hot-spiced race; for her mother, Sir William's sister, had possessed ten times more will and power than he had ever had, and the Leightons were famed for their strong, straightforward character. Clare loved her cousin Hope very dearly. With Brenda and she it had always been a sort of armed truce.

"Why not speak out plainly, Brenda," she said, quickly. "Uncle William and we are going to have a concert this morning, because we can't go out. Hope thinks it would be best to give it in one of the lower rooms, but Brenda has chosen the blue drawing-room. I think it will be a good thing if you come to the rescue and decide the knotty point, and so save further bloodshed."

Sir William's handsome face coloured, and then he grew pale.

"Come, Sir William, you must support me!" Brenda said, with playful bitterness and meaning. "We can't have mutiny at Thickthorn Manor, can we?"

Hope said nothing, but Hugh Christie felt his heart throb, as he saw her lift her eyes and look at her father.

Sir William was confused and uncomfortable.

"The blue drawing-room!" he said, as the door opened, and Dr. Gunter made his appearance. "Of course if you desire it, Brenda, my dear; but it has been shut up a great many years—a great many years," Sir William repeated unsteadily, "and the damp and—"

"The blue drawing-room!" said Dr. Gunter in quick tones. He had come up behind his pet, Hope, and his hand was lying on her shoulder caressingly. "I trust no one is thinking of using the blue drawing-room! What is it? A concert to be given there? Heaven bless my soul, I can't hear of it! Do you know, Miss Brenda, that poor young fellow's bedroom is just above, and the slightest noise can be heard? You must kindly do nothing of the sort, if you please. I am answerable for this sick man's condition, and I cannot have his life jeopardised for all the concerts in the world! Very sorry to upset your plans!" Dr. Gunter said, noting Brenda's angry face with an inward chuckle,

"but it is simply out of the question, unless," and here the doctor turned abruptly to Sir William, "unless, Carruthers, you are prepared to take the consequences; and of course if you choose to stop all chance of my pulling my man out of the fire, why—"

Sir William rose to the occasion.

"My dear Gunter, your word is law on such a point. Very sorry, my dears, to upset your arrangements, but you see there is a bigger authority than me, and doctors must be obeyed. I hope you can be comfortable in one of the other rooms!"

"What do you want with a concert? Why not take your battledore and shuttlecocks, and keep yourselves young and warm?" Dr. Gunter said, as he stroked Hope's soft masses of hair, then he bent down to her. "Come out. I want to speak to you, little one!"

Hope rose obediently. Next to her father her affection was stronger for Dr. Gunter than it was even for her grandparents—not the love she gave to the old servants nor the devotion she bestowed on Dicky, but a steady earnest sort of affection, with that sense of reliability, dependence and trust which should have been allied to her love for her father; but which, alas! was impossible with his weak, purposeless nature.

Dr. Gunter took the girl in his arms when they were outside in the hall, and kissed her tenderly.

"Got the best of Madam Brenda that time," he said, with a chuckle.

Hope smiled tearfully up into his kind, ruddy face.

"How good you are to me!" she said, softly. Then, quickly, "is he so very bad?"

"About the same, my dear, about the same. Didn't do himself any good by tearing out of bed last night. I shall have a lot of trouble with him, and he must be kept quiet. No concerts or any such nonsense, though we know, don't we, little lady," with a sly wink, "that it would take a great deal more than an impromptu concert to penetrate through the walls and floors of dear old Thickethorn." Dr. Gunter indulged in a good chuckle at this thought. "But, of course, we can't expect Brenda Grants and suchlike to know these things. She was reared in a jerry-built house, I'll be bound, my dear, and so we make some allowances; and now let me have a look at you, my fairy. Umph! You are very pale, fairy! I am afraid my patient gave you a turn last night. I shall have to prescribe a tonic for you!"

Hope smiled.

"I was a little frightened by him, poor man," she said, glad in her innocent heart to be able to give this cause, which was partly true, from her white cheeks. "I feel so sorry for him, Dr. Gunter. I wish we knew who he was, and where his friends are. They must be so anxious."

"Well," said the old doctor, patting her on the shoulder. "Don't let the matter worry your pretty little head. He will pull round all right, and I am sure you have quite enough to do to tackle Mrs. Brenda. Run along, and tell Mrs. Carmichael to give you a glass of the old port. You look like a snowflake this morning."

Hope laughed at this, but her laughter lacked the real ring of merriment, and Dr. Gunter knitted his brows and looked grave as she flitted away.

"It was different when she was a child. Things did not trouble her in the same way, and that remarkably objectionable young woman could not hurt her as she does now. If only Carruthers would put his foot down once and for all," and then Dr. Gunter sighed a sharp, quick sigh.

His friendship and affection for his old friend could not blind him to his weakness, and many a time had he longed to spur Sir William on to take some definite and determined course within his own walls, if not outside them.

"The child has a look in her face that pains me to-day," he said to himself, as he walked

slowly up to the sick room, and then an uneasy thought came. "I hope to Heaven Christie is not amusing himself with her? If I thought that!"

Dr. Gunter clenched his strong right hand, and the expression on his face boded no good to Captain Christie, or, indeed, anyone who should bring a shadow on Hope's young life.

"I am an old fool," he summed up, finally, "to go seeking for other troubles when Madam Brenda is so much to the fore. 'Gad, I'd give a round thousand to see that young woman marched off to church and married. Thickethorn would take a new lease of life, I do believe. I know I would dance a jig for joy, despite my seven-and-sixty years, but I am afraid there's no such luck in store for us just yet awhile. The men of to-day are not all fools!"

And with this remark Dr. Gunter opened the door of the darkened room, and was soon tending the sick man with all his wonted care and skill.

CHAPTER IV.

BRENDA GRANT had studied society and its ways to some good effect. She had learnt very early that it was impossible to let the world know anything of any truth whatsoever, and that, no matter how angry, or vexed, or hurt one might be, the smile must be ever on the lips of a *mondaine*, and pleasant words must never lack.

So, though her temper after this little scene at the breakfast-table was simply at boiling heat, she managed to hide her vexation as well as she could, and to continue the day as though nothing had occurred.

She had always disliked Dr. Gunter, and feared his sharp tongue, but the anger she felt this morning was not towards him, but towards Hope.

Brenda also had had an unsettled night. Although she had prevented any *à la tête* conversation between Hope and Hugh Christie she had not produced much satisfaction as far as she herself was concerned, for Captain Christie had been by no means amusing when alone with her after Hope had gone to bed, and Brenda resented his preoccupation as an insult to her appearance and her charms.

At breakfast time, too, she had suffered several jealous pricks, as she noted how admiringly Hugh's brown eyes rested on Hope's face.

She did not let her jealousy, however, blunt her hopes. She knew that her money alone would have been a sufficient lodestone to one situated as Captain Christie was even had she failed to amuse and interest him, as she knew she had done.

She never realised until this jealousy about Hope sprang into being how much store she had set upon becoming Hugh Christie's wife.

She loved him, as far as it was possible with her to love anyone, and her ambitious heart thrilled as she counted up how much this marriage would give her.

Hugh was closely connected with some of the best families in England. Brenda had studied his genealogical tree well; she knew its every branch by heart. It was one of her pleasantest dreams to sit and conjure up visions of her future—of her visits to Lady Anne Christie, her widowed mother-in-law, of her friendship with Lady Agneta Montague, Hugh's aunt, and his cousin, the old Marquis of Gainsborough, that famous statesman and scholar, whose works were known all over the cultivated world, and whose cold, proud, keen spirit and wit had become recognised and valued as something extraordinary as the years rolled on.

There was an unspeaking fascination to Brenda Grant, the tailor's daughter, in the study of this old aristocrat. She had heard through the tongue of society of the Marquis's indomitable will and pride.

She had seen him driving and walking in the London streets, she had read his speeches, and followed his political path.

A sort of hot rush of delight came over her when she realised that she might and would become closely connected with this man.

She encouraged Hugh Christie to speak of his family as often as she could, the smallest detail was interesting to her. One day she said to him, after pondering deeply,—

"Who will succeed the Marquis if anything were to happen to Lord Steermount?" and Captain Christie had answered, slowly,—

"Why his son, little Errol, would take the title, of course!"

"And after him?" Brenda had questioned on.

"Steermount has a brother, you know." Then, seeing Brenda's look of surprise, Hugh had gone on. "After all, it is not very strange you should not know, for Douglas the second son, has never been to the fore at all, I believe." Captain Christie had continued, ruminatingly, "that he and the Marquis came to some awful loggerhead years ago, when Douglas was quite a boy. My mother declares the old man behaved very badly to Dad, who was a ton better than Steermount in every way. I remember we used to have fine larks together. He and I; and then all of a sudden Dad disappeared. They tell a story of his father having cut him off and banished him from the country, though what on earth for I don't know!"

"And where is he now?" Brenda had questioned, eagerly.

"No one knows. He may be dead for all we have heard of him. I asked Steermount a year or so ago for news of Douglas, but he shot me up in his sanctimonious way. I don't love Steermount," Hugh had confessed. "He is a fool and a sneak. Douglas was quite another sort, only, of course, he disgraced us all. He must have done something awful, or the old man wouldn't have been so rough on him."

"Then if Lord Douglas Kelise were dead, and anything happened to Lord Steermount and his boy, who would be Marquis of Gainsborough?"

"I fancy I should have that honour," Hugh had answered, strangling a yawn. Family history was not in the least interesting to him, and he did not follow the bent of Brenda's mind. The idea of his actually coming into the marquise's was so remote, it had never crossed his mind. He was much more interested in wondering how he was going to pay his way during the next few months, and if it would be any use applying to Lady Agneta again to help him—a doubtful prospect, he feared, for he had drained his aunt as much as his mother.

But if he gave this question of possible inheritance to an old name and a big rent roll no consideration Brenda never let it slip from her mind. It had become a sort of mania with her. She was never tired of dreaming that a series of accidents had come to pass, and that Hugh Christie was, by a freak of fortune, transformed into the Marquis of Gainsborough, one of the premier peers of the realm. That she should be safely tied to him as his wife before this most improbable event should happen was her one and only desire now. And thus it may be easily imagined what uneasiness and jealousy had burst into flame, when she saw the admiration Captain Christie had always bestowed upon Hope as a pretty child deepen and intensify dangerously, now that Hope was becoming a lovely woman.

"I can't bear to look at Brenda this morning," Clare Leighton said to her lover, as they sat apart and talked in dreamy whispers. "She really gives dear little Hope such malignant looks. I believe she would like to do her a mischief. We must have Hope to stay with us darling, very often when—when we are married."

And Mr. Druce immediately would have agreed to have an elephant or a rhinoceros on a perpetual visitation had his pretty little love decreed the same.

Hope was conscious of Brenda's anger. She winced beneath the affection of indifference. Little things that others would not have noticed stung her and hurt her sharply. She felt that Brenda was only waiting her opportunity, and

that she would have to suffer for her temerity of the morning. But better that a thousand times, she said to herself with half a sigh, than that her father should be annoyed, or Dicky grieved in any way.

Christmas was, after all, a very quiet affair at Thickthorn. The illness of the strange young man who had been carried, senseless and battered, into the old house prevented much festivity—not that the noise of the laughter and music would have had much power to affect the invalid, for he lay for days in a state of unconsciousness, which Dr. Gunter regarded with quiet anxiety. But the sense of some one lying in the house so ill that, at any moment, the sands of his life might glide away altogether, did not tend to encourage any desire for amusement. Fortunately the snow had disappeared as quickly as it had come, and the Carruthers' hounds met constantly, much to Brenda's disapprobation. Being a terrible coward on a horse, she naturally could not be expected to enjoy the hunting which was so dear to Sir William, and all about the place; and to hide this cowardice she was in the habit of talking down riding for women as being unfeminine and absolutely objectionable. If she ever imagined she would deter Hope from riding to hounds she was much disappointed, for the girl was a born Carruthers where sport was concerned, and combined skill in horsemanship, with extraordinary courage.

It was a bitter moment to Brenda when she saw the whole party mount and ride away. She invented all sorts of excuses to keep Hope at home.

The days were slipping by. Hugh Christie had been at Thickthorn Abbey nearly a fortnight, and still he had come no nearer the point for which Brenda alone lived.

She had no desire or intention to have a hurried marriage. All she wished was to have caught her fish and publicly advertised him as her property.

It would never be possible for a Christie to slip through her fingers, she opined, for the scandal would be so great if he attempted such a thing.

She could not understand why he delayed. He had been more than attentive to her during his stay. He had paid her a dozen compliments a day; he had praised her wit, her smartness, her clever head; had insinuated delicate flattery about her figure and her face; had openly admired her numerous dresses, and led her to understand there was very little about her he did not admire. Still, he had not spoken right out, and she knew his need for money was increasing instead of growing less, for his brow had a habit of contracting when the letter-tray was produced at the breakfast-table, and he received his correspondence from her hands.

Brenda was growing impatient, and with her impatience her temper did not improve.

She bullied her mother, and drove Sir William out of the house with her tongue. The servants came in for their share, and Dicky was never out of disgrace. Perhaps Hope out of the whole household suffered the most.

Brenda had a clever way of insinuating things, of planting a sting in a most tender spot, and she was skilled by now in wounding and hurting her step-sister. For every pleasant moment spent with Hugh Christie Hope suffered an hour of misery from Brenda.

Poor child! she had not the one to all this. She was so wrapped up in her young, delicate dream, she did not imagine that Brenda had taken her hero, and spun her matrimonial schemes about him.

As for Christie himself, if he had not been so harassed by debt and lack of money, he should have enjoyed the situation immensely.

Every man is vain, and every man is selfish, but Hugh combined both these qualifications to a more than ordinary extent.

The fact of Brenda's eager desire to be his wife, and Hope's shy, beautiful love gratified him beyond all measure, and it pleased him to

keep the comedy playing a little longer simply for amusement.

He was not, as a matter of fact, in any real hurry to be married. Single life to a man of his personal attractions and habits was full of charm; but necessity is a hard driver, and Hugh had arrived at a definite conclusion that he would have to do something to mend matters before very long, and the only way in which he could obtain that something was by sacrificing his liberty for a definite and tangible satisfactory result.

Brenda Grant without money would not have occupied his mind a second time; but, backed by an income of several thousands, she became almost a desirable object.

Hope, on the other hand, sweet, delicate, lovely, shy Hope, pleased his fancy more than any woman had done of late; but, as he said himself,—

"What the deuce is the good of adding to my difficulties! I can't keep myself. How am I going to keep two people? Besides, a wife who is very much in love is an awful bore," and then he would glance at Hope, and a tender feeling would come again.

"She is a little angel though, there's no doubt of that! What a sensation she would make as a fellow's wife, well-dressed and smartened up a bit? Why on earth hasn't she got the money, and not Brenda?"

It was an ignoble position that Captain Christie was maintaining at this juncture—a position that must mean ultimate discomfort to one of those two; and of those two it would be Hope who must suffer, and yet from sheer vanity and selfishness the man would not bring matters to a crisis, and so save the girl from becoming hopelessly lost in her first dream of love.

"I suppose I must end it," he said to himself one morning, as he attired himself in hunting gear, preparatory to starting off for a long day with the hounds, "and must offer the fair Brenda my hand and heart. Poor little child!" this time he was not thinking of Brenda. "I feel I shall not be able to look at her. She will bear it well. That's where blood tells; poor little thing! How sweet she looked last night in that white frock, and her hair knotted round her head. She wanted no diamonds or other jewels. I don't think I will speak to Brenda; I will go away and write it. It will be easy so, and I shall miss that child's face. I wonder how Brenda and my mother will get on, and Lady Agneta? She is a good imitation, but she is an imitation."

Hugh turned at this moment and saw his man standing with his letters. Captain Christie rarely joined the hunt breakfast; he got through his correspondence in his room before leaving for the day. He tossed the letters down.

"The usual sort!" he said, with a smile. "Well, thanks to Brenda, they won't trouble me long. What's this! Laurence Courtland's fist! What does he want? If it's another request, I—" he opened the letter, and ran his eye over it, emitting a slight whistle as he finished.

The letter was not long but it was pithy.

"DEAR OLD CHAP,—

"Just a line to tell you old Hampshire dropped down dead in Pall-mall to-day. I thought it might interest you to know that his granddaughter, little Miss Carruthers, comes into a pretty tidy sum through this. Forgive this abrupt announcement; but, as I happen to know your pecuniary condition, I thought a hint might not come amiss, particularly, as I hear (so matter how) that the young lady is pretty, charming, and by no means averse to your society. I am obliged to run over to Paris for a few days—the usual story. Write me when you have time.—Yours ever,

"LAURENCE COURTLAND."

Hugh let his hand drop with the letter. He drew a deep breath. What if this should be true? What if Hope—? He looked at the letter

again. "Oh! it must be true. Courtland was always right on these points; he knew every thing and everybody."

Hugh's heart beat quickly. What a stroke of luck! He could scarcely realise it yet. His man had gone out of the room a few minutes ago, and now returned.

"Sir William begged me to tell you, sir, that he will be unable to ride to-day, and in fact that the meet must be postponed. Sir William having just received the news of the death of his lordship, the Earl of Hampshire."

"Where is Sir William?" Hugh asked.

"He went downstairs to find Miss Carruthers, I think, sir. Leastways, that's what I heard him say, Miss Carruthers was out in the courtyard."

Hugh pondered for a moment. He must strike at once—long before the thought could dawn in their minds that any other impetus had been given to him save a man's natural desire to comfort one whom he loved tenderly, when sorrow had come unexpectedly.

"Give me my hat," he said, and crumpling the letter in his hand, and thrusting it into pocket, Hugh ran downstairs and out into the courtyard.

He was just in time. Sir William was speaking to Hope. The girl had been standing beside her mare, patting it and stroking the smooth skin of her pet.

Hugh saw her lift her lovely eyes to her father, then her face blanched. He heard her give a low sort of cry, and then she leant against the saddle.

"You mustn't be upset, my fairy!" Sir William said, trying to console her, the big tears rolling down his own cheeks, for he went back to the past, when the dead man had confided his delicate lovely Sybil to his care and blessed their marriage. "Don't cry, my darling."

Hugh Christie came up hurriedly.

"Miss Carruthers—Hope—you are ill!" his anxiety seemed very real.

"She has had a shock," Sir William said, drawing her to his arms. "You've heard the news, Christie?"

"I have heard nothing," Hugh lied easily and earnestly. "I—I only thought of Hope. I cannot bear to see her like this. Sir William, don't think me wrong or strange, but I love her, and I cannot bear to see her in grief. Hope my darling! Hope lifted her tear-stained face; one little hand clung to her father, the other was in Hugh's possession. Her lips were trembling. Sorrow and joy mingled together in her glorious eyes.

"Father—Hugh," she whispered, and her head drooped on her throat like a flower bent by the breeze. Out of a moment of supreme pain—for she had loved the old man deeply, tenderly—had come a sudden happiness—a happiness—she could not realise in this moment, even though Hugh stood beside her, and held her hand.

When he stooped his handsome head, and kissed that little hand, Hope thrilled and woke—woke to find, poor child, that joy and sorrow walk side by side in life, and that the moment that should have been the paradise of her youth was shadowed by a grief that was not to be dismissed or forgotten.

(To be continued.)

Among the feathered curiosities of Queensland are the strangely acting birds familiarly known as the "Twelve Apostles," from the circumstances that they are always seen in flocks of exactly twelve—never either more or less. Whether such a little company consists of an equal number of males and females is not known. But in the nesting season they all build in the same tree, and all feed the nestlings promiscuously. How the number of such a flock is always adjusted is an unsolved question. The bird is something like a blackbird in appearance, but of a rustier colour.

ETHEL'S FLIRTATION.

CHAPTER XIV.

The sound of the door opening and closing caught the ear of the sick man, who had waited so long and had listened so intently for it.

"Ethel!" he called, eagerly; "Ethel, darling!"

There was the sound of quick footsteps, the soft rustle of a woman's dress, and some one was bending over him.

"Ethel, my life, my love!" he murmured, eagerly, stretching out his hands.

But the little hand that was laid upon his forehead was not the warm jewelled hand of Ethel, but the plain, trembling, cold hand of Annie. He realised that even before she said—

"It is I—Annie."

"Is she with you?" he asked, eagerly. "Ah! surely she has come. It is cruel to keep me in suspense."

"No," said Annie, sadly, "she is not with me."

The cry that broke from his lips was hard for her to bear, it was so full of bitter desolation and disappointment.

"Did you see her?" he asked. "Tell me all quickly. I am sure they are keeping my darling from me. Oh! Annie, is it not so?"

The question gave her a happy thought, and she acted upon it at once.

"Listen, Harry," she whispered, "Ethel cannot come to you. Yes, she is kept from you. You must hurry and recover to go to her."

"Ah, Heaven! how cruel they are," he moaned. "But it is as you say, Annie, I must hasten to get strong enough to go to her. Then bolts and bars shall not separate us. I shall have the greatest incentive this world can offer to leave this sick-bed. But tell me; you must have some message for me from my darling."

"There are only these words, repeated over and over again, that you must make haste to get well."

"Nothing more than that?" he asked, with great disappointment. "Ah! you hesitate, little Annie; there is something else to tell—I am sure."

"I only want to say this," said the girl, in a low voice, "you must try to realise that one young girl never sends messages of love by another. When you see her I think she will tell you that."

A light like a glory came over his despairing face.

"I never thought of that!" he cried. "Oh, Annie!" seizing her hand and covering it with kisses, "what a comforting angel you are to be sure."

From that moment he seemed to have but one ardent desire, and that was to get strength enough to get to The Firs once more, and clasp his darling in his arms.

The happiest moments he knew, lying there on that bed of pain, was clasping Annie's hands and unfolding to her his plans for the future; how he would work night and day for wealth and fame for Ethel's sake, and how happy he would try to make her.

It was pitiful to note how his every thought centred around her. She was the Alpha and Omega of his every hope, his every ambition.

The doctor was greatly pleased at the progress his patient was making, and at the end of a fortnight he broke the astonishing and joyful news to Mrs. Venn that he had great hopes of saving Harry from being either blind or crippled.

"It is the assiduous and careful nursing that has brought about this result," he declared, looking at Annie with a smile.

Mrs. Venn's joy and gratitude knew no bounds, and as for Annie, no words could portray with what thankfulness she heard the

joyful intelligence. Surely Heaven had answered her fervent prayers.

During all that fortnight no message, not even an expression of sympathy, reached the occupants of the humble cottage from the proud young heiress of The Firs.

"How easily she forgot Harry and accepted another lover," thought Annie, indignantly, when she heard Ethel Whiteley's approaching marriage to Clare discussed on all sides.

Twice she had seen her riding by as she was walking up the village street, and both times Miss Whiteley had turned coolly away without recognising her, much to gentle Annie's keen mortification and distress. It was painfully evident that the heiress had no possible use for her—that she meant to cut her acquaintance entirely.

It was a never-to-be-forgotten day when the doctor announced that on the morrow Harry might venture beyond the confines of the little cottage, for on that day another event happened that changed the current of three lives.

Early on that morning a letter had reached the cottage, written by a lawyer in a distant city, announcing briefly the death of Harry's uncle, and in the will which he had left Harry was named as sole heir to his entire fortune, which amounted to something like a million of money. A goodly cheque accompanied the letter.

With streaming eyes the widow threw herself into her son's arms.

"Heaven has been more than merciful to us, dear," she said. "How thankful we should be! And another thing—we must do well by poor little Annie Wells. Remember, you owe your eyesight—ay, your very life—to her constant watchfulness and care."

"Annie shall not be neglected, mother," he promised; "we will talk about that later. I—I cannot help but give all my thoughts now to anticipating how pleased Ethel will be. I can hardly realise that I shall be permitted to leave the cottage to-morrow, if it is pleasant, and that I shall see my darling Ethel!"

He wondered why his mother uttered no word, but commenced to sob on his breast.

"Even the greatest pleasures often have their drawbacks," he went on. "The doctor forced from me the promise that if I did venture out I must still continue to use this crutch and these blue glasses for a week to come. Of course such a sight will terrify Ethel; but she loves me so well she will not think very long of how hideous they make me appear. And, oh! mother, how surprised her father will be when he hears of the immense fortune I have come into possession of; and when I ask him for Ethel, mother, I do not think he will look upon my suit with disfavour. Ah! how great is the power of gold, mother. I am so thankful to have it—for Ethel's sake! Not that it will make the slightest difference to her—bless her!—for she loved me when I was only her father's poor secretary."

He little knew why his mother sobbed on his breast, or dreamed that she was petitioning Heaven that he might not die from the terrible blow that awaited him.

Long and earnestly Mrs. Venn talked it over with Annie as to whether she ought to tell Harry the whole truth before he sought Ethel, or to let him go unprepared to meet the blow in store for him.

They both concurred at last in the opinion that it would be the wisest and best for him to learn of Ethel's duplicity from her own lips.

A carriage was called early the next morning, and Mrs. Venn and Annie watched him depart with eyes blinded by tears.

Ah! how happy he looked. But how soon all that will be changed!

As the carriage rolled quickly through the village streets Harry gave himself up to thinking over all the episodes of the past, and particularly of that tragic moment in which he had risked his own life to save Ethel's.

How he had received the blow which came so near causing him to shuffle off this mortal coil

he could not determine. That it had been dealt him by the treacherous hand of his rival, Clare, he never once dreamed, but quite believed it had been caused by the hoof of his plunging horse.

How his heart leaped when the tall turrets and gables of The Firs loomed in sight!

Mr. Whiteley greeted the young man cordially, expressing himself as highly pleased at seeing his young secretary about so soon, and hoping he would soon be able to take his place at his desk.

There was just the slightest suspicion of a smile about Harry's lips. He wondered what the haughty lawyer would say if he were to reply:

"I shall never take my place at your desk again, sir. I am a rich man now."

Why, at that moment his great good fortune seemed to him more like a mad vision of his own imagination than a solemn, sober reality.

Mrs. Whiteley was glad to see Harry. She could quite afford to show her friendship for him now that Ethel's betrothal to Clare conclusively proved to her there was really no love affair between her daughter and the young secretary.

"I am rejoiced to see you so nearly recovered," she said, holding out her jewelled hand to him; "and doubly rejoiced to learn that the chances are that you will come out of this sad calamity neither blind nor crippled. We had all grieved so much over that. No one will be more pleased than myself when you are able to throw away both spectacles and crutch. I am very sure Ethel will be pleased to see you, Harry; she is in the conservatory—or, rather, was there a moment ago. I will call her."

"If you will permit me I should prefer going to her there," he returned, eagerly.

"As you like," returned Mrs. Whiteley, indifferently.

With some difficulty he made his way to the conservatory. Yes, Ethel was there. She did not hear him enter—she was not aware of his presence, although he stood so near her that he could have put out his hands and touched the folds of her dress.

He gazed at her with his whole soul in his eyes, and the slanting golden sunshine that streamed in from the arched eastern window never shone upon a more beautiful picture. It would have charmed a beauty-loving artist and have made his fortune if he could have reproduced on canvas that lovely slender form in fleecy white, the dark, haughtily-poised curly head, the dark, piquant dimpled face, and the perfect arms—from which the sleeves fell away at the elbow—upraised to the drooping lemon bough above her head.

He could have knelt down and worshipped her where she stood. And in that moment a great flood of thankfulness filled his heart that wealth had come to him. Ah! how he would lavish it upon her. She should have every wish of her heart gratified, if money could purchase it for her; but the sweetest thoughts of all to him was that she loved him for himself alone.

Yes, those beautiful snow-white arms and that perfect alabaster throat should shine with gems; and, oh! how proud he would be of his peerless Ethel. And he wondered if all men who were in love loved with the same intensity that he loved dark-eyed Ethel.

As if compelled by the mesmerism of a near presence, Ethel turned her head slowly, and beheld him standing there.

"Ethel!" he cried, rapturously, extending his arms to her; "oh, Ethel, my darling!"

CHAPTER XV.

INSTEAD of the flash of love that he had expected to see light up her eyes he beheld something very like fear.

"Ethel," he repeated, "am I so changed, dear, with these terrible glasses and crutch that you do not know me? I am Harry, your lover."

He moved nearer to her, and would have clasped her in his arms, but she drew hastily back from him.

"I am sorry you came here," she said, and her voice sounded cold, harsh, and unnatural even to her own ears. "You should never have done it."

His arms fell to his sides, and he dropped down as suddenly and heavily on the nearest seat as if he had been shot.

Was this girl standing here so cold and proud, so indifferent before him, the wilful, impetuous little darling whom he had clasped in his arms a hundred times while she whispered that she loved him, and that nothing in this wide world should ever part them?

"Ethel," he cried, "am I mad, or is this some horrible dream? Surely you have not changed toward me in so short a time! Tell me you care for me still?"

"If I were to say those words they would not be true," she answered, shivering as she looked at him.

At that instant he beheld a flashing diamond on her hand, and a deadly pain like the sharp cut of a knife smote him to the heart. He caught her hand, and despite her efforts to draw it from his grasp gazed at it steadily.

"That is not the ring I gave you, Ethel!" he said, in a voice husky with emotion. "Where is mine? You never wore it on your hand—you had it attached around your neck by a silken cord, you said."

"I have been intending to send it back to you," she said, in the same cold, pitiless voice. "You shall have it directly—I will go and get it for you."

He stepped quickly forward, barring her exit.

It almost seemed to him that the great strong heart in his bosom slowly broke as the words fell from her lips.

"Be plain with me—I do not understand," he faltered. "For the love of Heaven, be frank—tell me what has changed you so, Ethel, for you are changed? Dim as my eyes are, I saw that when I first looked upon your face. I realised it even before I heard you speak. You owe it to me to tell me the truth. Have you ceased to love me, Ethel?"

"You mistake me!" she said, haughtily. "What you are pleased to call love I have looked upon as only a romantic fancy—a pleasant flirtation between you and me. It ended with my betrothal to Mr. Clare, which took place a fortnight ago. I am sure nothing further remains to be said, Mr. Venn. You ought to have realised, even better than I did, when I opened my eyes to the actual facts of the case, that the great difference in our station in life precludes all such mad thoughts as love or marriage between us."

He rose slowly and faced her. Her words had gone home—they had struck to the very core of his heart. He gazed at her steadily as she stood there in the bright warm glow of the sunlight, her beautiful face so proud and cold, and as he looked, the love which had filled his heart changed slowly. His love died a violent death. Her cruel, scornful words had killed it.

"Only a flirtation on your part—a romantic fancy!" he repeated. "While I live I shall never forget those words. I have said that I love you—that I worship you. I take back my words. Had I known you as I know you now—fair of face, but cold and proud, without pity, without heart, my love would never have been offered to you!"

"I am very glad to hear it," she replied, frigidly, and her coolness angered him even more.

One gleam of pity or of tenderness would have brought him to her feet again, but her proud indifference enraged him more than her scorn.

"Is this all you have to say to me, Ethel?" he said, hoarsely, "all—after what we have been to each other?"

"Yes. I would advise you to go and marry Annie Wells—she loves you, the silly little thing!"

"The time will come when you will repent the words you have uttered to me to-day, and wish that they had never been said," he muttered.

"I do not think so," she replied, imperiously. "Be kind enough to allow me to pass, Mr. Venn."

With a heart as heavy as a stone he stepped aside.

"Good-bye," she said, proudly, as she turned away, leaving him there alone.

She did not see that he went to the spot where she had stood, and, kneeling there, kissed the cold marble square her feet had touched. "It is all over," he said to himself.

The darkness and chill of death and desolation had fallen over him, and the light of Heaven seemed to shine for him no more.

He had been so unutterably happy in his love, and now—

"I cannot face life again," he cried. "I cannot bear it. I wish to Heaven that I had died."

He thought of the great fortune that had just come to him, and he laughed aloud in his bitterness.

It had come to him—too late. What did it avail him now? It had come to him—too late!

How long he remained there on the spot where his love had been crushed within him he never knew.

He stretched out his arms with a woful cry. Ah, beautiful, proud face! Ah, scornful, sweet lips! The memory of them would never leave him while life lasted.

With unsteady steps, and swaying to and fro on his crutch, he made his way down to the carriage in waiting, muttering to himself, as the ponderous arched gates closed after him with a dull, resounding thud, that his proud, beautiful love should torture him no more. She had taken his heart in her hands, and crushed it ruthlessly.

The sun was setting when he reached home, and it seemed to him the clouds piled up high in the western sky were the colour of blood.

He saw his mother and Annie standing in the doorway, and he knew they were watching for him. Oddly enough, as he saw her standing there in the waning light, Ethel's words came back to him, "Go and marry Annie Wells—she loves you."

Then his senses became suddenly confused. The red clouds, the sky, and the two forms in the doorway seemed to be rocking to and fro in one dark mass. Then his carriage came to a standstill.

How he got out of it and reached the porch he never knew.

"Mother," he said, wearily, "I have come back to you again. I am sorry I did not die before I came back to the cottage."

The next moment he was lying senseless, with his head on his mother's breast.

Then there came another weary fortnight of watching beside the couch on which Harry Venn lay between life and death, and again Annie was his faithful nurse. She scarcely eat or slept for days at a time while his life was despaired of, and her only solace were the oft-repeated words of Harry's mother, "You could not be more of a comfort to me, dear, if you were my own daughter."

It was a lovely sunshiny morning when he awoke again to a realisation of what was passing around him, and awoke, too, to the consciousness that some one was kneeling beside his couch weeping bitter tears.

Who was it? He opened his heavy eyes slowly and saw the fair bent head of Annie, and he wondered vaguely why she should weep; but even as he asked himself the question, the past, with all its sorrows, passed like a great kaleidoscope before him, and the bare branches of the trees outside, as they tapped against the window-pane, seemed to repeat Ethel's scornful words, "Go back and marry Annie Wells—she loves you."

He thought of it as he lay there quietly and listened for one brief instant, then suddenly

and pityingly he reached out his hand and laid it lightly on the fair bowed curly head.

"Annie," he said, faintly.

She raised her head with a startled cry and shrunk back from him, but he had caught the little hand and held it.

"Why do you weep?" he murmured. "You must tell me."

"It was because I—I—thought I should have to go away without saying good-bye to you, Mr. Venn," she faltered, "and, oh, that would have been so hard!"

"Going away!" he repeated. "Why, where are you going, Annie?" and an uncomfortable sensation swept through his heart at the very thought.

She hung her pretty head, he saw her lips quiver, and her sweet blue eyes fill with great tears.

"You must tell me where you are going?" he urged, "and why you are leaving us. Have you not been happy here, little girl?"

"Happy! oh, Mr. Venn, it has been Heaven to me here!" she sobbed; "but now you are so well that your mother can do without me, and I must not stay any longer."

"But where did you think of going, Annie?" he persisted.

She burst into tears and laid her face in her hands.

"I do not know yet, Mr. Harry, but surely He who watches over the homeless birds will take care of me."

"You have neither home nor friends," he said, slowly, "save this roof-tree and those who are under it. Why will you not remain with us, Annie?"

"Oh, I cannot, I cannot!" she sobbed. "I must go away."

Again, as the sobbing cry fell on his ears, he thought of the words, "Annie Wells loves you—go and marry her." Did she love him? Ah! was there ever anything in this world so cruel as to love one that did not return that love? Was that her grief? She was homeless, friendless, penniless—would she not gladly have remained were this not the case?

Suddenly a strange idea came to him—an idea so startling that at first it almost took his breath away. What was life to him—love and happiness were evermore to be a dead letter to him. If Annie cared for him why not make her happy if it lay in his power?

He gently drew the little hands away from the lovely, despairing white face, and gazed into it searchingly.

"You say you have been happy here?" he said, gently.

"Yes," she sobbed, "oh! so happy, Mr. Harry."

"And it grieves you to leave here?"

"Yes," she sobbed again.

"And that means that it grieves you to leave mother and me?" he persisted, and again the fair head was bowed in assent after a moment of hesitation. "Then look up into my face while I ask you this, little Annie. Will you consent to stay here as my wife?"

CHAPTER XVI.

ANNIE turned as white as death; she looked into Harry's face with startled eyes.

"I repeat, Annie," he said, slowly, "will you remain here as my wife? You need not go out into the cold, cruel world alone, friendless, penniless, helpless! I will protect you, cherish you; you shall have everything your heart craves—that money can buy. What is your answer, my dear girl? Perhaps," he added, after a moment's pause, "you want time to think it over."

The hand he held was as cold as ice; she would have drawn it from his clasp, but he held it closer, looking earnestly in the girl's lovely pale face.

"I can give you your answer now, Mr. Venn," she faltered. "You—you are asking me to marry you on the impulse of the moment, and I say to you no, I will not. The time will come when you will thank me

for that answer from the depths of your heart."

He did not love Annie Wells, it is admitted frankly, still he was man enough to feel considerably piqued at the girl's point-blank refusal of him when he had every reason to believe that in secret she loved him with her whole soul.

"Will you give me your reason, Annie?" he urged. "I could not be satisfied with that answer without it."

And the clasp of his white hand tightened upon her own.

"I might just as well be candid with you as not," she answered, with a pitiful attempt at a smile. "You may ask me to marry you without a particle of affection for me, and without that wedded life must be sorry indeed. No, I would rather die than marry another girl's lover—and you love Ethel Whiteley!"

He started back as though the words had stung him.

"Annie!" he cried, "listen to me and believe me. I loved her once, and with all the deep passionate love of my nature, but now I swear to you every vestige of that love is dead—it was killed at one blow. I believed her little less than an angel—I found I had been greatly deceived in her. I turned away from her a changed man—with my idol shattered, my love-dream broken. I shall never look upon her face again—never in this world! I am going far away from this spot where I have known the height of happiness and the depths of despair, and my mother accompanies me. I ask you again, Annie, will you go with me—as my wife?"

"But you do not love me," murmured Annie, with a little hard sob.

"I believe you love me, Annie," he said, boldly; "and if this be really the case you will not allow your pride to raise a barrier between us. Take time to think the matter over, and give me my answer a week from to-day. If it be 'yes' I promise to make you a true and devoted husband. My mother has already informed you regarding the change in my prospects. You were my true and noble friend in adversity, and now I would show you my sincere appreciation in prosperity."

There was the sound of footsteps in the hallway without, and Harry had just time to whisper: "Remember, I shall hope for your answer one week from to-day, Annie," ere Mrs. Venn entered the room, and Annie, with flushed cheeks and eyes brighter than they had been for many a long day, soon after made her escape.

She never remembered how she gained her own room, but once there she flung herself down on her knees and wept as she had never wept in all her young life before—but it was for joy, not sorrow.

It almost seemed to her that it must be a dream—a wild fancy of her disordered brain—that Harry Venn had actually asked her to be his wife!

As for him, a dreary sigh broke from his lips as the door closed after the girl.

"Yes, it is quite true—poor little Annie loves me," he muttered, burying his handsome face despairingly in his hands. "How strange that I never noticed it before. I can see it now in her every look, her every action. Poor little girl! Ah! well, if by devoting the balance of my wrecked life to her I can make her happy why should I not do it?"

True, there would never be passionate love between them, but he would be very careful that she should not realise the lack of it.

The following week was one of great activity in the Venn cottage. Harry was so far recovered that the doctor had declared the crutch and blue glasses were no longer necessary, and once again he looked like the handsome young secretary of yore.

He was busy settling his affairs in Westmoreland, but for all that he could not help but notice how Annie avoided him on every possible occasion and, in spite of the fact that he had no love for her, he began to look

forward with much curiosity to the day when she was to bring him his answer.

He little knew how exciting that week had been to poor Annie Wells. No one ever knew how she paced the floor of her little room for long hours at a time, crying out to Heaven to guide her in this all-important dilemma of her young life.

Should she marry him or refuse him? That was the question she asked herself over and over again. Could she school her heart to the bitter thought that if she refused him she would see him never again? No wonder, loving him as she did, the girl's heart was torn with conflicting emotions; and she realised that life would not be worth living if separated from him.

At last the eventful morning dawned. Annie purposely absented herself from the breakfast-table, but Harry found her alone in the cosy little living-room when he entered it an hour later.

She was standing at the window, gazing dreamily out into the sunshine, and so intent was her thoughts that she did not hear his step, nor was she aware of his presence until he laid his hand lightly on her shoulder.

"Annie," he said, gently, "I have been looking for you all the morning."

She uttered a little cry, drawing shyly back, her lovely fair face suffused with a scarlet blush like the flaming heart of a great red rose.

"Don't you know, Annie, that the week of grace is up?" he said, looking down into her blue eyes. "Have you an answer for me, little girl?"

For one moment she hesitated, then turned and placed both her little white fluttering hands in his.

"I am yours if—if you want me, Harry," she said simply.

He stooped and touched the girl's lips lightly, murmuring that he hoped she would never regret those words; but in that moment he could not help thinking how commonplace this betrothal was in comparison with that other; but he quickly discarded the thought as being disloyal to the girl who had just promised to be his bride.

Mrs. Venn was delighted over the affair when her son called her into the room and announced his engagement to Annie.

She took the girl in her arms, declaring, as she kissed her warmly, that no news in the wide world could have pleased her better.

It brought tears to Harry's eyes to note how very fond his mother was of Annie.

When he placed the betrothal ring upon Annie's finger it almost took her breath away.

"Is it a diamond, Harry?" she cried, aghast, looking with dilated blue eyes that seemed to catch and imprison all the sunshine about her.

"Yes," he answered. "Are you pleased with it?"

"It is too fine—too grand for me," she said, in a low voice. "I do not think that it was ever intended that I should wear anything like this!" and tears began to fill her eyes.

"Do not say that again, Annie—you pain me," he said, gravely. "I consider the ring a very common one—for the bride of a rich man."

She looked up into his face with wistful eyes.

"The bride of a rich man," she murmured. "Oh, Harry, am I worthy of that? I—I am so plain."

"You are all that is good, true, and pure," he answered. "What more could any man ask for in a wife?"

Harry had insisted upon an early wedding, and to this his mother had joined her earnest entreaties, so what could Annie do but consent.

It was decided at length that the wedding should take place at Fairlawn, a handsome country-seat near Carlisle, which had been among the possessions willed to Harry Venn by his eccentric uncle.

It had been the home of Mrs. Venn in her

girlhood; she had gone forth a bride from beneath that roof, and it was in compliance with her earnest wish that it was decided the ceremony should take place at Fairlawn.

Annie was to remain under her protection as her protégée until that all-important event transpired.

It was not long until the news of the vast inheritance which Harry had fallen heir to, together with his engagement to Annie Wells, became noised about in Westmoreland.

Mrs. Whiteley and Ethel heard it with great astonishment from the lips of a visitor who had called.

"Worth half-a-million of money!" gasped Mrs. Whiteley, when she found herself alone with her daughter. "I—I always had a liking for your father's young secretary, Ethel," she declared, "and always said he would make his mark in the world. Half-a-million of money! Why, do you know, dear, that is nearly twice as much as I am supposed to be worth? I—I must confess I am a little sorry that you threw young Venn over for him. But, after all, he could not have been much in love with you, my dear," she added, consolingly, "for the same report conveys the intelligence to us that he is to marry Annie Wells."

Ethel Whiteley had listened with a face white as death. At the very mention of her old lover's intention of marrying another, all the old smouldering love in her heart seemed to burst anew into flame. But the worst trial of all to bear was the intelligence that Harry Venn had come out of the terrible accident neither blind nor crippled, but more handsome, more gallant than ever!

"His intended marriage to Annie Wells is announced through pique!" declared Ethel, vehemently, adding, with flashing eyes, "Why, I could draw him to my side again, mamma, if I were to speak one kind word to him, give him one smile, one gracious look. I will not believe that he is to marry her. I tell you it will never take place mamma," she cried, vehemently—"never!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE knowledge of Harry Venn's change of fortune and his betrothal to Annie had been a great shock to Ethel.

She had never for one moment imagined it possible that he could think of any other girl with thoughts of love or marriage—save herself.

How often had he declared to her that unless he won her for his wife he would go down to his grave unmarried!

He had never visited The Firs since that memorable morning on which she had sent him from her summarily; but once since then she had seen him driving by with Annie Wells, and the sight of his devotion to her, and the smile on his fair, handsome face had pierced her to the heart like a dagger thrust, and then Ethel realised that the love which she had believed dead in her heart had only been sleeping, and had needed just such a stimulus as this to awaken it again into new life.

To Francis Clare the news of his former rival's good fortune was most unpleasant. He was shrewd enough to see that Ethel's parents would regret losing him for a prospective son-in-law, now that he had a million of money at his command; and as for pretty, piquant Ethel herself, to be sure of her he must urge that their marriage take place at once—delays were always dangerous.

To this arrangement Ethel demurred. "A fortnight is too soon, Frank," she declared. "I have changed my mind. I will not marry you for six months at least."

He found, to his despair, that entreaties were of no avail—the patted little heiress could prove quite stubborn when she chose.

Creditors were now pressing him hard on all sides for money, and the only thing that could save him from utter ruin was his

marriage with Ethel Whiteley. Yes, the marriage must take place at once.

The ruse that he was called abroad suddenly, and wished to take her with him as his bride, failed signally.

"I repeat that I have changed my mind, and shall not marry you for six months to come," she insisted, and from the hour that he became convinced that she meant to carry out this decision Francis Clare was a changed man.

As a last resort he applied to Mr. Whiteley, and, after a lengthy conference together, Ethel's father sent for her.

"I want to talk to you on a very important subject, my dear," he said, as she came into the library and seated herself on the hassock at his feet. "Will you give me your full attention, Ethel?"

"Certainly, papa," she answered, "if you do not intend to lecture me on the same old subject—Why don't I marry Francis Clare?"

"That is just what I sent for you to discuss," he declared. "The time has come when you must trifle no longer, and the marriage must take place at once, Ethel."

The girl raised her dark, arched eyebrows and looked at him, and the red lips were curled into a very scornful smile.

"The wishes of the lady is supposed to be considered in such cases," she answered, adding, with a slight tremor in her voice, "I—I wish I had never consented to marry him. I have the greatest mind in the world to break with him entirely."

She was quite terrified at the effect those words produced on her father.

"Ethel," he cried, "you cannot mean it! You dare not break with him!"

The girl sprung to her feet, her dark eyes flashing.

"Dare not, papa!" she echoed. "Surely those are strange words to use to a Whiteley. I never considered it a matter of compulsion—simply one of inclination. Why, pray, could I not break a betrothal if it failed to be agreeable to me?"

Mr. Whiteley's face grew whiter still—great beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead, and his hands shook like leaves in the wind.

"Papa!" cried Ethel, in terror, springing to his side and flinging her white arms about him. "are you ill?"

"Yes—no," he answered, incoherently.

"There is something the matter, papa," said the girl, holding him off at arm's length and looking at him steadily. "Tell me what it is."

"If I only dared!" muttered the lawyer, with a deep groan.

Ethel was thoroughly frightened; she never remembered seeing her father agitated like this before. There must be something terribly wrong.

"If I only dare tell you, Ethel," he repeated. "But no, I must not; I—Ah, you would hate me, and I could never endure that—and it was all done for your mother and you."

"What was done for mamma and me?" persisted Ethel. "Tell me papa; you need have no fear in confiding anything to your own daughter."

"Swear to me that you will never reveal it to anyone if I make a confidante of you—not even to your mother," he said, huskily.

"Not even to mamma?" she asked, in wonder.

"No," he reiterated, sharply; "not even to her."

"I will be guided entirely by your wishes in the matter, papa, and promise absolute secrecy," she said, kneeling down on the hassock at his feet.

He took her little firm white hands in his own trembling ones.

"Ah, Ethel! you must not hate me when you know all," he whispered huskily; "you must not forget that what I did was for you and your mother's sake."

"I shall not forget, papa," she, said earnestly.

"I might just as well break into the subject at once," he cried hoarsely, "though it is bitterly hard to find words to explain to you your father's crime."

"Crimes!" cried the girl, dropping his hands and recoiling in horror.

"Do not shrink from me, Ethel," he muttered. "Though the whole world turns from me you must stand by me."

"I will, papa," she declared earnestly.

"It is not a long story to tell," he groaned, "but it would convey a terrible lesson to the world if it were but known—the story of a man's ambition—and what it led to."

"I was comparatively poor when I married your mother, Ethel," he commenced. "She married me for love, though many a wealthy suitor wooed her; but for all that I knew how dearly she prized wealth and power."

"I vowed to myself I would win these for her; but I little dreamed how great the cost would be."

"The early struggles of my career as a lawyer it is useless to dwell on. The turning point in my life was when I was asked to take charge of a vast estate owned by the infant heir of the Clares, and which lay in different portions of the country."

Ethel gave a great start, but instantly suppressed the cry of astonishment that broke from her lips; but without noticing it he went on:

"I managed the estate for long years, having sole charge of it, and—and it brought temptations. I overdraw my salary many a time and invested it. I went deeper into speculation. Sometimes I lost, but more often I won, and I meant to replace the amounts taken from time to time when I had gained an efficient competence."

"I reached the height of my ambition when the world called me a millionaire."

"One day, that which I had dreaded for long years occurred. Francis Clare, the heir to the Clare estates, came suddenly upon me without warning and demanded the books. I cannot describe the scene that followed."

"He asked for the whole of the cash that had accumulated, also the bonds, and found both missing. There was a stormy scene, and in the very midst of it you entered the library, Ethel."

"After the first glance at your bonny face Clare turned to me like a man in a dream."

"Is that lovely girl your daughter, sir?" he asked, in a low breath.

"Yes," I said; and I had no choice but to introduce him to you."

"In a moment or so you passed from the room. Then he turned to me with a strange, odd smile."

"Your daughter is the most beautiful being I have ever beheld!" he said. "She is the first girl I have ever met who has awakened in me the desire to call her wife, and to win her I—I would give a dozen fortunes if I had them."

"Listen to me," he cried, drawing his chair closer to mine. "This is a case of love at first sight with me. I threatened you a few moments since with disgrace and prison if you could not produce the money due to the Clare estates; now, I make another proposition to you: Influence your daughter to marry me, if it is within your power, and I will let the whole of this unfortunate business drop—and, what is more, you shall have as your reward one half of the whole Clare estate. You now see how thoroughly in earnest I am. I—I would go through fire and water to win your lovely daughter, sir!"

"I cannot coerce her in a matter which involves all her future happiness!" I cried. "You could not ask that!"

"If I fail to win her," he cried, darkly, "I cannot be expected to show you mercy—and I will not! I give you fair warning, and we may as well understand each other. Will you use your influence with her in my behalf or not?"

"I saw disgrace and ruin around me, and I

realised, even in my excitement and trouble, that discretion would be the better part of valour—to save myself I must temporise with him, humour him; it would at least stave off the horrible difficulties of the present—this was a great consideration."

"What do you say to my proposition?" he asked, sharply.

"My—my daughter could not please me better than by marrying you," I answered, huskily. "I will do all in my power to further that object."

"You know the rest, Ethel," Mr. Whiteley went on, wearily. "You see the precipice on which I stand, and know what awaits me if you throw him over. But still, my darling child," he cried, "I will not coerce you into this marriage if your heart rebels—not even to save me from a prison cell!"

The girl slipped down on her knees at her father's feet and looked up at him with dark, terrified eyes.

"You shall never go to prison, father!" she sobbed. "I—I will marry Francis Clare—and—and—save you!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

FROM the hour in which the story of her father's crime was unfolded to her Ethel Whiteley was a changed girl. She was no longer capricious and gay; she lost the piquancy that was her greatest charm.

She was not the grand heiress she had always imagined herself to be. One word from Clare, and they would step out from that lovely home as poor as the poorest beggars that walked the village streets. Ah, Heaven help her; she had always been so proud of her wealth and power!

She tried to think what she could do if such a dire calamity were to happen—her father in a prison cell, and her helpless lady-mother looking to her, the stronger of the two, for guidance.

She had never been face to face with the cruel realities of life before. No wonder the thought appalled her. She had always looked down on humble working-girls. What had she, the heiress to a million, in common with them? Now it occurred to her how wonderful and great a thing it was to possess the knowledge of gaining one's own living.

Then her thoughts turned to Harry Venn—the handsome young lover whom she had spurned so scornfully because he was poor and afflicted.

How little she had realised then that their situations would be reversed so soon.

Ah! if she could but go to Harry now, and, in folded in his strong arms, her dark curly head on his breast, his fair, handsome, sympathising face bent over her, and tell him all her troubles! Then in the midst of this intense longing came the thought like a cold chill—he was soon to marry Annie Well-plain, humble little Annie.

And a bitter sigh broke from her lips over the lines that occurred to her,—

"Of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these—it might have been."

"I must not allow my thoughts to dwell upon Harry," she murmured, with a great tearless sob. "It is useless—useless. There is no way out of the labyrinth of woe that shrouds me save my marriage with Francis Clare. What matters it, since it must be, whether it takes place this month or next?"

When Clare called the next day, he was greatly surprised to see the change in Ethel, and to learn her decision.

"The wedding cannot take place too soon to suit me, my dear," he said, gallantly, attempting to take the little white hand lying so idly in her lap. But Ethel drew haughtily back.

His brow grew dark as he looked at her.

"Will you tell me what has brought you so suddenly to this view of the case," he asked.

"No," she said wearily; "I—I will not talk about it."

"You have no need," he returned, sharply. "I can readily see that your father has made a confidante of you—you know all. Is it not so?"

She did not answer, and as no denial came from her lips he felt assured that his surmise was quite correct.

When Clare asked if the marriage might not take place that week, Ethel uttered no demurrer, although the time was alarmingly short.

Since she had learned of the hold he had on her father, and that her hand was the price that saved him from a prison cell, she had begun to detest Francis Clare.

Despite the haste, it was decided that the marriage should be a grand affair; the *déte* of the whole country should be present.

Both Harry and Annie received invitations, but not for worlds would he attend. His mother was sure of this even before she went to him with the two invitations in her hand.

(To be continued.)

A TERRIBLE ORDEAL.

CHAPTER IX.

THERE is no wiser warning in the English language than the quaint north-country exhortation which urges people "not to cross the bridge till they come to it." How many times in life people wear themselves out nearly with anxiety as to what they shall say under certain circumstances, what they shall answer to certain questions; and, lo! and behold, before the critical moment comes the circumstances are changed, and the dreaded question never put?

Something of this kind had happened to Jessy Campbell. All through the sleepless hours of the Sunday night after she had parted from her lover she was asking herself how she should bear the condolences of his mother, and the anxious questions of her own! Eager to spare the girl who was his son's choice as much sorrow as he could Mr. Melville simply told his wife Paul had been obliged to leave for London without waiting for their return from church; and as Jessy was on her way home by eleven o'clock the next morning, she was away from Warham before it was needful to tell Mrs. Melville the graver news that remained behind.

And as for Jessy's own mother, Mrs. Campbell did indeed ask if Paul had brought her home; but she was so overcome by the terrible loss that had befallen her, she seemed to feel no surprise at the answer that Paul had been obliged to go away on business, and there was no telling exactly when he would be back.

It seemed Mr. Campbell's death had been sudden at the last. He had been in unusually good spirits the day before, but a little past midnight had been attacked by spasms of the heart. A doctor was sent for, but he said at once it was hopeless, and before daybreak the sufferer was dead.

"He was quite conscious," said Mrs. Campbell, who seemed to feel it a relief to pour out her troubles to Jessy. "He left his dear love to you, and said he could trust you to Paul with all faith. He was talking a great deal about all you children yesterday, and he told me no two engagements could have pleased him better than yours and Marion's. You might be making what the world considered a better match, but Mr. St. Orme had a heart of gold. Just at the last he said the weddings must not be deferred because of him!"

Jessy's eyes filled with tears.

"I could not leave you now, mamma; and you see Paul is away, so you must not mind keeping me with you!"

Mrs. Campbell kissed her fondly.

"I am never weary of my children, Jessy; but I am thankful the Melvilles are such a generous family, and love you so well, for I fear when your father's affairs are looked into

there won't be so much money as we thought; but, fortunately, they are not the people to value you a whit the less!"

"And Mr. St. Orme has no relation, while he himself would be faithful to Polly if she was penniless. Dear mamma, you must not trouble about us, we shall n't mind so that you are comfortable; but oh, how we shall miss him!"

The widow only answered by her tears.

But the next day fresh troubles were in store.

Jacob Campbell demanded an interview with his stepmother, and the poor widow being really too ill to see him, Jessy went downstairs to receive him. She was only the third sister, and had no wish to push herself before her elders, but they had both begged of her to go, because she was supposed to be Jacob's favourite.

He openly ridiculed Marion for accepting a lover whose income was under two hundred a-year, and having the instinctive aversion all coarse natures feel for bodily affliction, poor deformed Louisa was his special antipathy. Jessy, as a pretty, striking girl, engaged to a man of good means and intellect, he quite approved of, and therefore she agreed to see him.

He saluted her with a careless handshake, and a—

"This is a bad business, Jess."

Jessy was not afraid of him, and answered calmly, for somehow, she could not have cried before Jacob.

"If by bad business you mean our father's death I quite agree with you, Jacob!"

"Don't be impertinent, child. Sit down and listen to me, for I have a good deal to say to you. Had you any idea your father was in difficulties?"

"Mr. Melville told me, when he said good-bye yesterday, that he believed our father," she could not resist a little stress on the pronoun, "had made some unfortunate speculations!"

"That's just it," said Jacob, emphatically, nodding his head. "For the last five years everything has been going wrong. You see, the old gentleman," here Jessy winced, "was soft enough to stand security for a friend who absconded, and left him with ten thousand to pay. He had to mortgage the houses he meant for you girls, and from that time forward he was mad about shares. Every shilling he could draw out of the business he speculated with, and everything he touched failed. If it hadn't been for me I believe he would have endangered the solvency of the concern, but, of course, I saw to that!"

"Of course, as it was to your own interests."

Jacob looked at her sharply, and resolved not to spare her.

"I like plain-speaking best," he said, quietly. "And as your mother declines to see me I suppose she means me to speak to you. As you're going to marry young Melville you won't need to be so down as the rest about the way things have gone."

"Mother could not see you," said Jessy, gravely. "She is really ill. If you will tell me exactly how things are, Jacob, I shall be really obliged to you. Speak to me as though I were a man, please; old Mr. Melville says I have a good head for business."

"You've a very decent share of brains," admitted her half-brother, condescendingly. "I believe my father has left a will bequeathing his house property to you girls, and his share of the business to your mother and the boys. This house and everything in it goes back to me."

"Yes; I always knew we should have to leave this dear old place! I hope you will take Henry into the business, Jacob; father always meant him to be a chemist."

"It won't rest with me, Jess. I am going out of the whole concern. Miriam never cared about my keeping a shop. And, as she had a substantial legacy left her last year, we shall do very well."

"You promised to speak plainly," remarked Jessy, "about our prospects. You are only telling me of yours."

"Well, 'pon my word, Jessy, things look pretty black! My father's last El Dorado, The Great Wheel Bang Company, went smash last week. As one of the largest shareholders, the calls on him will be pretty heavy. The liability was unlimited."

"Will they take the houses?"

"The houses are gone already. The old gentleman did not pay the interest, and they foreclosed last month."

Jessy shuddered.

"I can't understand how it was. He never seemed to want for money. My father never seemed in debt."

"Because, so long as he lived, he received two thousand a year from the trustees of his first wife's property; and your mother, who is a very good manager, made that suffice; but the moment he died it stopped."

"Then we have only the half purchase-money of the business?"

"You have not that. When I saw how bitten my father was with the speculation mania I bought him out. For a sum of money down I purchased his share of the business. I promised he should remain master in name all his life; but, really, in law, for the last three years, he has been only my paid manager."

Jessy marvelled how he could stand there in the house where his father lay dead, and say such cruel things; but she had a wonderful power over her feelings, and she kept quite calm.

"Then, Jacob, we may sum it up in one word—ruin?"

"It won't hurt you, Jess," he said, with just a tinge of rough good nature, for she was his favourite in the family. "Melville'll stand true to you, I'll go bail; and he is so uncommonly well off, he might be willing to lend a hand with the others."

"We have nothing, then?"

"There's a thousand pounds which was settled on your mother when she married; it'll bring in fifty pounds a year, and nothing can rob you of it, it's tied up so tightly. Then Miriam has some property in the country, and we both thought you might perhaps like to settle there. It's a good, healthy part, where living is very cheap, and you could have a good-sized house rent free."

Jessy did not show the scorn he expected. She knew perfectly that Jacob's offer was prompted by a desire to put a good wide space between him and his poor relations; but she knew also that if their circumstances were indeed so different it would be far less painful to begin life afresh in a strange place. Poverty in London with little children would be terrible!

"Where is Miriam's property?" she asked, gravely. "If it was very far north I am afraid it would be too bleak for the little ones."

"It's quite a mild climate, near the coast, and has a good many educational advantages, so you'd be able to bring up the youngsters cheaply. Tell your mother from me if she thinks of it I will furnish the house for her, pay the whole expenses of the move, and allow her a hundred a year."

It was meagre enough, but as Jessy had expected nothing it came as an agreeable surprise. Jacob rose to go, casting—unintentionally, it is true—another arrow at her poor heart.

"Miriam told me to be sure and say if you thought of being married soon you could come to us, and have the affair from our house. Of course, it would have to be quiet, but she'd see you had a proper outfit, and so on."

"It is very kind of her," said Jessy, simply. "Please thank her, but tell her there is nothing settled."

There was a council of war that night while poor Mrs. Campbell was sitting in the nursery between the four elder girls, Henry, a fine spirited boy of fifteen, and Bernard St. Orme, who sat by Marion's side, and did his utmost

to make the others feel that in him they had another brother.

"So you see," said Jessy, who was spokeswoman, "if we go to Dornington we can depend on a hundred and fifty pounds a year, and a house rent free. Jacob said he would undertake to get Charley into the bluecoat school; and I think, Marion, you and I could teach Edith and the three little ones."

Mr. St. Orme interposed. His plan was that he and Marion should be married at once. He had been saving up ever since his engagement, and could furnish an eight-roomed house. By taking the junior curate as a boarder he thought he and Marion might not only be able to risk matrimony, but offer a home to Louisa.

Louisa's eyes glistened. To go into the country, away from her guild class and Sunday-school, would have been a hard privation to her.

Mr. St. Orme explained kindly she might be of real use to him and Marion in their busy life, and so far from thinking herself a burden she would be a kind of feminine curate.

"That is two of us disposed of," said Kate, naively. "But oh! Jessy, it will leave me, the eldest, at home, and mother says I am the most useless of all her girls!"

Jessy blushed crimson.

"I shall be at home a good while longer, dear," she said, gravely. "Paul has been obliged to go to America."

"And when will he be back?"

"I don't know."

"It makes no difference," said Kate, dejectedly. "The Melvilles will be sure to take possession of you."

And when John Melville came to his old friend's funeral, and as her future father-in-law demanded to "have a chat" with Jessy afterwards, the first thing he did was to tell her she must come home to Warham, and wait there until Paul claimed her.

Jessy shook her head.

"If I am to wait patiently hard work is best for me. My mother really needs me. Dear Mr. Melville, don't tempt me to leave her."

"And what are you going to live on, child?"

He was so indignant when she told him that Jessy almost smiled. He wanted to make Mrs. Campbell an allowance, to pay her for Jessy's board—in short, to do anything to make things easier for his favourite.

"Dear Mr. Melville," she said, gratefully, "we can't live on your bounty. If you want to do us a real kindness I will tell you what mother and I have most at heart. Poor Henry! it is his darling wish to be a chemist. Father had promised it, and now there is no chance of the premium, and he thinks he will have to try for a clerkship."

"I'll see to that," said John Melville.

And he did. Henry Campbell was received as indoor apprentice by one of the first firms of manufacturing chemists in London, and Mr. Melville not only paid the premium without a murmur at the heavy amount, but added another hundred, and requested it might be returned to the boy as salary.

"He'll want a trifle for dress and postage stamps, you know, and his mother's a widow. Just pay him thirty pounds a year quarterly, and let him think he's earned it."

Then, when he was just ready to start for Warham after attending Mr. St. Orme's marriage and giving away the orphan bride (who, for that one day, put off her deep drooping mourning), once again John Melville and Jessy were left alone.

"Any news of my boy?" he asked her, sadly. "My child, this suspense is trying me sorely."

"And me too," she answered. "But I have heard nothing since he left me that Sunday."

"And you are sure he said America?"

"He said so, but I am not sure whether he meant he was really going to America or only that he could not settle down, and must wander about until he achieved his purpose."

"I see. You think he may have used America figuratively, as a man may talk of sending anyone to Jericho?"

"Yes!"

"And you still think it was his temper, Jessy? You still fancy he is wandering about, trying to atone for some folly committed in a moment of madness?"

The girl bowed her head.

"I do!"

"Then Heaven help us!" said John Melville, sadly, "for it takes years sometimes to right a wrong that's done in a minute, and his mother and I may be dead and gone before our boy comes back."

He looked at Jessy for consolation, but she attempted none. Her heart was too full. John Melville saw the tears roll down her face.

"It's hard on us!" he repeated, "but it's worse on you. Child, when I think of what he's made you suffer, I feel almost ashamed of him."

"Oh, hush, hush!" pleaded Jessy, passionately. "Remember, he is your son and my lover. It is not us he wronged. Depend upon it he suffers more than we do."

"And you mean to keep true to him come what may, even if he is away for years?"

"Yes!" said the girl, quickly. "If love is worth having time cannot change it. Paul may not come back at all, or not until I am an old woman, with wrinkled cheeks and feeble steps; but whenever he comes, Mr. Melville, he will find me just the same in heart. I gave him my love once, and it will be his always, in time and in eternity."

And John Melville's own eyes were not dry as he turned away.

It was strange, but everyone was so busy in the excitement of packing up, and so troubled by the loss of the kind, indulgent father, that no one but the boy Henry seemed to realise that of all the family it was Jessy who suffered most.

Like most large families, the young Campbells presented a great contrast.

Marion and Louisa were near each other in age and had always been paired off together, till they really seemed to belong in some way specially to each other.

The sister next Jessy had died in babyhood. Kate was one of those bright, merry creatures who are the darling of the whole family rather than the sole companion of any special member of it. So that Kate stood alone, and Jessy and Henry clung to each other. He was the last of the elder ones.

Mrs. Campbell had had seven children in the first eight years of her married life, of whom (much to her stepson's relief) two were dead. Then came an interval of six years before the five "nursery" children.

So Henry was the only one to bethink himself how hard things were for Jessy, and the last night they were together, before the morrow when he joined the celebrated chemists, and his family went to Dornington, he said something to her about it.

"You look so thin and pale, Jess! I wish Paul was here to take care of you. When is he coming home?"

"I don't know, dear!"

The boy's face looked grave.

"I say, you haven't quarrelled, have you? I'm sure Mr. Melville was as nice to us as ever, and you know he has paid ever so much money for me."

Jessy smiled faintly.

"He is just as kind as he can be, and Paul and I have not quarrelled. I can't explain it to you, dear. I never loved him better, and he was never worthier my love than now; but he was obliged to go away, and we can't tell when he's coming back!"

Harry started.

"Do you mean he's ill?" he asked, sadly, "and that he had to go away for his health?"

Jessy shook her head.

"I cannot tell you; only, Harry, if ever my engagement is discussed, and I am not by to defend him, you must speak up for Paul. If he had known father would die, and things go

so badly with us, he would never have gone away."

"How surprised he would be if he came back suddenly from America before he got your letters, and found strangers here?"

Surprised, indeed! Jessy did not tell her brother she had sent no letters—could send none, as she did not know her lover's address. Ah! how often she had pictured him coming back. Not to claim her—Jessy felt pretty sure her wedding day would never dawn—but just to look at the house which was her home.

That night she had a strangely vivid dream. Usually her slumbers were unbroken by dreams of any kind, but she had been thinking so much of Paul, it was, perhaps, natural visions of him should haunt her sleep.

She dreamed she stood in a country lane at a sign-post, where four roads met. She could only see three of the hands. On one pointing to the lane she had already traversed was written "To London," on the second, "To Warham," and the third bore this inscription, "To Dornington."

Jessy felt so miserable, because she was turning away from Warham, and the road to Dornington was new and strange, when suddenly Paul's face appeared before her, grave and anxious, but not despairing, and his voice sounded in her ears.

"You must go to Dornington, sweetheart. You will find there what I am seeking."

The next moment she awoke, the voice still ringing in her ears, her lover's handsome face yet haunting her.

Jessy Campbell never mentioned her dream to anyone. She could not have confessed it even to herself; but the vision conquered all her reluctance to go to Dornington, and made her as anxious to set out as she had before been to delay.

CHAPTER X.

DOLORES GLENVAL was carried unconscious into her uncle's house, and nursed with as much kindness and attention as though she had been a dearly loved child of the house instead of, as they all believed her, an absolute stranger.

Lady St. Arvans, whom the accident seemed to have roused as nothing else had done since her great sorrow, positively refused the suggestion of the doctor that the poor child should be taken to a hospital; and the Earl was too pleased to see his wife interested in anything once more, to refuse the shelter of his roof to the little waif, even if his natural kindness of heart did not make him eager to atone in some measure for the accident caused by his carriage.

One thing troubled both him and his wife. This girl, despite her shabby attire, was, they felt sure, of gentle birth. The very fact of her being out alone proclaimed her to be English, since no well-conducted French girl is allowed to go abroad unchaperoned.

Perhaps this poor child was the stay and comfort of some widowed mother, who might be suffering untold agonies of suspense on her account.

The doctor—an Englishman—advised them to send a full description of the young lady to the police; and this was done, somewhat reluctantly, for Lord St. Arvans hated the idea—but it brought no clue.

No one called to make inquiries about the invalid. She seemed as completely given up to the compassion of strangers as though she and they had been alone together on a desert island.

She was terribly injured. At first the doctor feared her recovery was impossible. Later on he told Lord St. Arvans she might, with the greatest care and most skilful nursing, pull through; but there was mischief done to the spine, and she could never walk again.

"I thought the injury was to her brain?" said Miss Dundas, who had installed herself as one of the girl's chief nurses, and as such had been allowed to be present at the doctor's

conference with the Earl. "It is more than a week now since the accident happened, and she has never spoken or showed the least consciousness of anything that went on around her."

"That is not due to any injury to the brain, but to the shock the whole nervous system has sustained," explained Dr. Galpin; "besides, I should say this poor girl had had some secret care pressing on her for months. Depend upon it, if ever she recovers sufficiently to tell you her story, it will prove a sad one!"

"I think she must belong to some orphan asylum," said the Earl indignantly. "Surely if she had relations, however poor they were, they would spare the time to make inquiries about her. Why, if she were a cat or a dog, they could not take her loss more indifferently!"

"None of our French orphan asylums would send a girl of that age out alone. She was not well-dressed enough to be a *démouille de comptoir*, as they call the shop-assistants. No, I should say, on the whole, that she belonged to some poverty-stricken English family, and supported herself by teaching her native language."

But the truth was to be known that night, and, oddly enough, it was Miss Dundas, who had felt such a terror of Mrs. Hector Glenval, who first learned their charge was her daughter.

The kind old maid was sitting with the invalid while the *secrétaire de charité* had her supper. They never left the sufferer alone, lest at some moment consciousness should return.

Suddenly the beautiful eyes opened, and fixed themselves on Miss Dundas. Then a thin, white hand went up to the invalid's head, where the short hair now clustered in little curls, since it had been out off in the fever of the first part of her illness.

"You have been very ill," said Miss Dundas, simply, "and the doctor said your hair must be cut off. I hope you are not sorry. It will soon grow again."

The girl smiled half wistfully.

"Do you think it will grow in three years?"

"It will grow in less than one," replied the Governess, cheerfully. "And now, my dear, will you tell me your name? Lord St. Arvans' horses ran over you ten days ago, and he brought you home, but we have not been able to send to your friends, because we could not tell who you were."

"Is this Lord St. Arvans' house?"

"Yes," rather annoyed at the sudden interest of her tone, for being of gentle birth, and having always lived in good society herself, Miss Dundas particularly despised people who seemed to attach much importance to titles.

"How very strange!" said Dolores.

"My dear," returned the Governess, rather testily, "it is of no consequence who lives here compared to your name and allaying your mother's anxiety. I suppose you have a mother?"

"Yes."

"Then tell me your name and address? Let me send for her at once!"

Dolores shook her head.

"She would not come."

"You may have vexed her," said the elder woman, gravely, "but mothers forgive a great deal. She could never refuse her pardon for any fault after such an illness as yours."

But the invalid was not convinced.

"My mother hates me," she said, slowly. "She has hated me ever since I was born, because I was not a boy! My father loved me, but he is dead."

"And does your mother live in Paris?"

"She doesn't really live anywhere. She is in Paris now. She is always wandering about. You must not let her come here!"

Poor Miss Dundas was distracted by two fears; one that her patient was delirious, and no faith could be placed in her ravings; the other, that the mother, who was "always wandering about," was a female burglar, and the poor child feared, if admitted to this luxurious house as a visitor to the invalid, she

might exercise her professional skill, and carry off a few of the Earl's more portable effects.

"My dear child," said the poor old maid, fairly bewildered, "you are talking very strangely. Can't you try to explain?"

"Are you one of the St. Arvans' family?"

"I am the girls' governess, and I have lived with them eighteen years. You may trust me with any secret, my dear. Why don't you want your mother to come here?"

"Because she hates the whole family!" and there was not a shadow of excitement in the fair, tired face; the girl only spoke as though she were stating a simple fact. "My name is Dolores Glenval, and my mother simply loathes Lord St. Arvans!"

"Dolores Glenval! You are Hector's child—the only child of his unlucky marriage!"

"The eldest child, not the only one. Miss Dundas, I used to long to come boldly to this house, and ask to see my uncle. I used to feel it was cruel that he should not know the truth my mother gloats over!"

All poor Miss Dundas's old terror of Rosa Glenval revived; but she felt nothing but pity for her unloved daughter.

"My dear girl, what does your mother gloat over?"

Dolores answered the question by another.

"Is it true that Lord Glenval is dead?"

"We fear so. But, my child, that cannot affect your mother. You have four cousins, any one of whom would stand between you and their father's property."

Dolores raised herself in bed. She looked like some fair vision of the night. There was no mistaking the truth and earnestness shining in her eyes.

"My mother says all the property was entailed differently about a hundred years ago," she said, eagerly. "That my grandfather and great-grandfather made a fresh entail to cut out a branch of the family who settled in America."

"Yes, dear," said Miss Dundas, soothingly, "I know. I have heard of it myself. If your father was alive he would be his brother's heir, to the exclusion of his own daughters. If you had a brother he would be the next Lord St. Arvans."

Dolores turned to her quickly.

"I have a brother!"

Miss Dundas looked incredulous.

"It is quite true," persisted the girl. "Mamma used to plot and scheme to hide it from my uncle. She was always delighted when she heard from England that Lord Glenval was still unmarried. And when the news came of his death—I cannot tell you, it is too dreadful!"

The tears rolled down the old maid's cheeks.

"Is your brother like you?" she asked, anxiously.

She had taken Dolores to her heart of hearts, and she was thinking, cruel as it was to fear her own pupils being despoiled, still a boy, as frank and open as sweet-tempered and refined as this poor girl, would not be a very dreadful relation to acknowledge.

Dolores shook her head.

"He is like mamma!" she answered, not reflecting this would not be a recommendation to her listener. "She often says that he takes after her in everything, while no one would believe I was her child at all. She never loved me. She said I was proud and stuck up, just like my father's family."

"How old is your brother?"

"Eleven; but he looks much older. He was only a baby when my father died."

"And is he with your mother?"

"He is always with her. I don't think she could bear to be parted from him. Sometimes, when mamma has money, he goes to school; but he does not like his lessons, and he is so big and backward for his age that one or two masters sent him away in disgrace."

The heir of St. Arvans expelled from cheap French schools! It was too terrible. Poor Miss Dundas felt in despair.

"I must tell your uncle and aunt who you

are my dear!" she said at last. "I am sure they will be surprised!"

Dolores looked at her wistfully.

"Do you think they will love me?"

Poor Miss Dundas, knowing the terror they had of her mother's daughter, could not say "yes;" but she remembered how they pitied the poor, neglected wail their charity had saved from death, and she hoped in time they would get over the fact of her parentage; so she said, cheerfully,—

"They are the kindest-hearted people I ever met, and I am sure they will be sorry for you. Do you think your mother would give you up, and let you live with the Earl always, if he wished it?"

"I don't think so. I wanted very much to leave mamma some months ago, but she would not let me."

"To leave her? Do you mean you wanted to be a governess?"

"Oh, no, I am not clever enough! Only you see he loved me, and would have put up with me. He was a Professor, and he spoke to mamma, but she would not hear of it. He was English, but we knew him in Germany."

"And where is he now?"

"I don't know!"

"Then you are not engaged?"

"Oh yes!" returned Dolores. "The day I am twenty-one I am to write to him. My birthday comes in the holidays, and he promised me he would go to the little pension, where I met him, and be there waiting. If I could, I was to come to him, if not I was to send him my address, and he would fetch me. We have only three years to wait now!"

So that was why the child wanted her hair to be grown again in three years' time. Well, it was a pretty romance, and Miss Dundas felt a pang of pity at her heart as she recalled the doctor's verdict that Dolores would never walk again.

"My dear child," she said, gravely, "three years is a long time! Are you sure you can trust this young man?"

"He is not young!" said Dolores, naively.

"He is ten years older than I am, and I can trust him perfectly. We cannot write to each other or meet sometimes, like other people, but we can wait and hope. He says he shall never be very rich, but I am not a bit afraid of poverty, and if only he can put up with mamma and Ronald I have no fear."

It would have been cruel to tell the child she must never be a poor man's wife—that as best she ought never to think of matrimony at all—but certainly not with a man who would require his wife to be an active housekeeper and busy manager.

She would find out soon enough that, though she felt no pain, she would never be able to do as she had once done, and since in any case three years were to elapse before she met her lover, there was no hurry to break down the poor little thing's day-dream.

This was the girl Lord St. Arvans had dreaded his son's being duped into marrying, and lo! she had given her whole heart to a poor Professor, who, in his own simple estimation, "could never be rich."

Miss Dundas went downstairs when the nurse resumed her post. The girls and their mother had retired. Lord St. Arvans sat alone with a troubled face.

"The very person I wanted," he said, kindly. "Come in here, and let me consult you on a letter I have just received."

"Willingly. I was wishing to speak to you. I have just heard our poor invalid's history!"

The Earl looked relieved.

"I am glad of that. If anything had happened to her, and she had died without any of her kindred about her, it would have been a real grief to me."

"Poor child! Her story is a sad one. She is the only daughter of a needy widow!"

"Just what we expected," said the Earl.

"Not quite. She begs most earnestly that her mother may not be sent for. She says from her birth she never loved her. The



[LORD ST. ARVANS WAS LEANING BACK IN HIS CHAIR, HIS FACE WHITE AS DEATH!]

mother's whole affections are centred in her son, while she declares Dolores is the image of her father's family. It was an unequal marriage. The husband was a soldier and a gentleman."

Lord St. Arvans looked troubled.

"You speak as though you believed the girl's story," he said, shortly.

"I believe it implicitly."

"But you know what the doctor said—she would never walk again. It seems to me we have no choice. We must break it to the mother; besides, depend upon it she will be touched by the poor child's misfortune."

Miss Dundas smiled grimly.

"I never spoke to her in my life, but I must confess I have not much faith in her compassion. However, you are the best judge of that, Lord St. Arvans, since you were once acquainted with her!"

"I!" exclaimed the Earl, in amazement. "Impossible! What can you mean?"

"That that poor child upstairs is Dolores Glenval, your own niece, and the child of the woman you and the Countess deemed unfit to remain as your nursery governess!"

"Hector's daughter—good heavens."

Miss Dundas felt she must try and enlist his pity for poor Dolores.

"I am sure you may trust our little guest," she said, eagerly. "She is a Glenval in thought and feeling as well as name, and I believe her mother has hated her for it."

"Does she know where she is?"

"Yes; that is why she so much wishes her mother should not be sent for. She declares Mrs. Glenval hates you all!"

"Very likely."

"Poor child! I had not the heart to tell her the extent of her injuries."

"No. It is a sad business. Perhaps her mother would give her up to us? We might ask her, if she proves really like her father. Anyway I must settle some provision on her."

Miss Dundas felt he would need all he had for his own girls. How could she tell him the

further revelation she had to make. Lord St. Arvans unconsciously helped her.

"Has Mrs. Glenval married again?"

"No."

"I thought you mentioned a brother?"

"Yes. He is eleven years old. Dolores says he was only a baby when his father died, and that he is very like her mother."

The last words were brought out with extreme difficulty, almost as though the poor lady knew the pain they would cause, but she could not bring herself to deceive the Earl.

A long, blank silence.

"Do you know what this means?" he asked her, brokenly. "Do you know that, confident in Royal's generous sense of honour, knowing he would at any time aid me to make suitable provision for his sisters, I have year by year spent all my savings on improving the estate until it is worth half as much again as when I came into it? My wife's jointure is secure, but it goes back to the estate at her death. Her dower reverts to her eldest daughter, the other three are penniless."

"I am very, very sorry," said Miss Dundas.

"But it seemed to me best to let you know at once. You might then take whatever steps were possible to protect your daughters' interests."

"I am an old man," said the Earl, brokenly, "and my troubles have come on me all at once. May Heaven only spare me until I have set my house in order, and done my best to provide for my poor girls' future."

"You spoke of showing me a note," said the Governess, slowly. "May I look at it now?"

"Here it is, but you will see what you have told me answers my doubts. I believed, when I read it, it was some mistake, but, of course, now I understand it."

It was a courteous and even friendly note from the venerable Vicar of Warham, who was an old college comrade of the Earl's. He mentioned that one of his parishioners had a son in a cheap, second-rate boarding school

near Paris, and that this boy declared he had a school-fellow called Ronald Glenval, who boasted constantly that he was one day to be Lord St. Arvans and master of the Castle.

The Vicar gave the name of his parishioner, a small ironmonger, and mentioned that his boy had at first been much flattered by the notice of "Ronald Glenval;" but that after getting all the information he possibly could out of him respecting St. Arvans and the neighbourhood, Ronald had suddenly decamped from the school, and it transpired, later on, his flight only saved him from being expelled.

Mr. Talbot wrote that he was far from crediting the statement that this young rebel was the Earl's heir, but that he deemed it his duty to inform Lord St. Arvans of what had happened, as either the lad was an impostor, when his boasts ought to be silenced promptly, or else, if he were indeed a relation, the Earl might like to take steps to remove him from his present surroundings—a cheap French boarding house and a foolishly fond mother, otherwise he would prove a disgrace to the whole family.

Every word of Mr. Talbot's letter confirmed what she had heard from Dolores, and Miss Dundas put down the letter with an aching heart. Alas! there was fresh trouble at hand. When she looked at him, the Earl was leaning back in his chair with his eyes closed, his face white as death, his hands clenched and rigid.

Hardly knowing what she feared, poor Miss Dundas rang for assistance, feeling as though there was no end to the heavy clouds overshadowing her friends. Royal's loss had been a cruel blow, but they had never known till to-night how fearful were its consequences.

(To be continued.)

THERE are six women police officers in the London police force, all employed as detectives.

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["I DON'T MEAN TO SEE YOU TRAMPLE ON EDITH'S HEALTH AND HAPPINESS!" SAID KATE, STERNLY.]

NOVELETTE.]

UNDER FALSE PRETENCES.

—O—

CHAPTER I.

"KATE look, quick! here's John Sanders coming down the road!"

"Go back from the window, Edith. He can see you laughing."

"I don't care if he can. He is trying hard not to look."

"Just as if anyone couldn't see him peeping round the corners of his eyes! Pretending he's curling the ends of his moustache, when it's so small you have to guess why his hand is there!"

"I don't see how he can be making all the money people say in his drapery business. Every evening up and down here he's looking at our windows. He ought to be counting up his books, or looking after his stock. I think you ought to settle it, Edith, one way or the other."

"Settle it! How can I settle it? Give me the twist. I have come to the button holes now; thank you," as she took the silk.

"You could be walking out of the square as he came in. and you know he would speak to you," said Kate.

"That's just what I don't want him to do."

"Don't you ever mean to know him? Then you have no business to smile at him from the window."

"I shall if I like. There's no harm in that! I am only having a bit of fun."

"I don't think it is right. You ought to move back when you see him coming."

"What! Stop sewing for ten minutes every day because a young man chooses to promenade our street! And where would next Sunday's dinner come from, and mother's little comforts?" she asked saucily.

The two girls sat in their bedroom at work. A door led into their mother's room. She was

very deaf, old and bedridden. Young dress-makers they are. When they started on their own account they took a little house in the road leading from High-street into Antrim-square. Both bore such a good character at Madame Clarice's, where they had served their apprenticeship, that this leading modiste willingly recommended to them such work as she considered beneath her genius or price.

Industry and economy had enabled them not only to furnish their own rooms, but two others were made very comfortable, and now stood ready to let.

Edith was busily stitching at a satin bodice. Under the soft folds, coiled in her lap, lay a little tabby kitten. She stopped now and then to stroke the smooth fur, and give a gentle encore to the purring murmur that pleased her so much.

A subject for Grenze she would have made. A face fit for a princess, Kate would say sometimes; most ladies of blood royal would be perfectly content if such beauty went with their rank. So sweetly moved her lips, as she smiled down at the little kitten, disclosing two rows of small, faultless teeth. A ruffle of little natural curls broke the line of her white forehead, while the fine brown hair was rolled back, and brushed up into a compact and becoming coiffure. Madame Clarice told her in a little parting lecture that her prepossessing appearance would soon bring customers, if she always paid that strict attention to neatness and respectability for which they would long be remembered at her high-class establishment.

Kate sat at the machine. She was not pretty, but you soon forgot that when you knew her staunch character and kind heart. The only opinion poor Mrs. Barnes had been known to express for years was a strong testimony of the everlasting forethought and unselfishness of her eldest daughter Kate. She was the one who did most of the plain sewing, while Edith was clever at cutting and fitting.

"Now I do call this young man nice-looking, Kate! Come and see."

"I can't, dear. This won't be finished far enough for you to go and try it on if I stop any more."

"He's looking about him ever so much. I do believe he's searching for lodgings. Suppose he has seen our advertisement, and come about it?"

"I think I must go and peep," cried Kate, running across the little room. "Oh, he is a swell. Splats and light clothes, and crooked stick! That's too grand for us."

"Oh, I believe he's going to number two," and Edith's voice fell, disappointed.

"No," cried Kate, quickly, "he's only counting the numbers, and two does look as though it were the first house. He's coming here—he is—there! oh! how am I looking? Am I tidy?" heartily combing the smooth hair, and snatching off a white apron. She was just going to the door.

"Wait, wait, don't seem in too much of a hurry. Yes, he's coming in, he can't see me; let him knock first. Gracious! what an everlasting knock, 'to be continued in our next,' I should think. Now go down, don't draw your breath so quick. I declare I feel as fussed as the first day Lady Victoria came here."

So Kate, with beating heart, went downstairs, opened the door, and faced the stranger who caused so much trepidation.

"Is this Antrim-square?"

"Yes," said Kate. "Are you wanting apartments?"

"Aw—yes; but this isn't really the square, you see, and I came because of the address."

"We couldn't put a map of the place in the paper," she retorted, rather angrily. She was too highly wrought to stand any nonsense; besides, she felt so certain he was far, far too grand.

"No, exactly. I am very anxious to live about here, and the address is good. I don't mind if they are small; they will be proportionately inexpensive."

Kate began to calculate rapidly how much she could charge that very swell get-up.

He came in, looked at the room with a critical, condescending air, then, turning to her, began to ask the price.

"I will just go and ask my mother," she disappeared.

The stranger gave a satisfied smile, muttering—

"Antrim-square—an Irish name. Cheap, and the exact spot."

Mrs. Barnes was long past offering advice; it was to her sister Kate ran.

"How much, Edith, quick! I thought we had it all settled, didn't you?"

"He will give a lot of trouble. See how his boots are shined! I don't believe he will brush his own clothes even. Say two pounds."

"He won't pay so much, I'm sure; say thirty shillings. I should be proud to have him."

When Kate went down he was comfortably seated.

"Thirty shillings," she said.

He stuck the handle of his stick in his mouth and considered a moment.

"Aw! that's too much. A guinea, paid in advance—no more."

She accepted those terms, adding—

"We should like references."

"Well, I live so quietly, 'pon my word I hardly know who to say. My name is Irvine, Wilfred Irvine. I am a nephew of Lord Ardoyne's, and his heir, Ardoyne House, Piccadilly. Daresay you know it!"

"You could have knocked me down with a feather," observed Kate to Edith, afterwards. "What grandees we are getting among, quite as good as Madame, and he's sure to extend our business."

"But for a nobleman's heir to come and live here, and not afford more than a guinea a week, isn't that strange? Everybody says Lady Balmourne is as poor as ever she can be, but she would think this as bad as the work-house."

"Well, he's coming to-morrow," continued Kate, "and when I said we could not undertake late dinner, he said he only needed tea."

"That's a good thing. I think it would pay us now to have Mrs. Martin in for two hours a day, don't you, Kate?"

"Yes, I do. My head is aching so with this fuss," said she, pressing her brow.

"Mine isn't. Puss, dear," said Edith, holding the kitten high between both hands, and kissing it lovingly, "we will run and get tea. Kate, put mother comfortable for the night, then go for a walk. We can afford a little time now, and we can't afford for you to get ill with sitting too close."

"Is it too far to go all the way down to the park, and have a look at—at Ardoyne House, that's the name. We shall be back before dark then."

The two sisters strolled by the refreshing green of grass and trees in the early spring evening, with a sense of ease denied to those who do not work.

At length, passing many London homes of the wealthy, they reached one, conspicuous for its two high entrance gates, a front court, then a fine sweep of steps leading to the hall door; it rose story upon story.

On the steps, having a look round, stood a servant with correct coat, blue plush breeches, white silk stockings, and shoes.

"Ardoyne House! Only look!" cried Edith.

Both girls took careful observations. The footman, thinking he was the object of their attention, gallantly kissed his hand; but he had made a mistake. With noses well up in the air, Kate and Edith walked sharply past the open gates.

"Impudence!" exclaimed the elder, shortly. "The more we go out together the more I see it is not safe for you to be much alone," with a protecting air.

"Neither of us likes going out without the other, so it's all right!" said Edith. "Fancy his uncle living in a mansion like that! What-

ever will he think when he comes to our little place?"

"Perhaps his uncle never goes visiting. I hope he doesn't. We should have to prepare a week beforehand."

The next morning Edith awoke with a start, and said to her sister—

"There's Mrs. Martin knocking. I don't like early mornings, do you?"

"I don't know that I specially dislike them," yawned the other. "Anyhow, I must get up now!"

"No, lie where you are," said Edith, laying her hand on her sister; and in two minutes she popped on her things. Without waiting even to wash or brush the tumbled hair she ran downstairs, and let in Mrs. Martin. They soon had a fire crackling, boots and knives polished, the hearth clean, and out with a broom for a general tidy up, and back again to her room for ablutions and devotions, before Kate knew what she had been doing.

"What have you been about, Edith? You know I never like you to spoil your hands with that sort of work. There's only enough for me to do, with Mrs. Martin helping so nicely," she grumbled.

"You will find enough to do to-day, dear. There's bedding to air, the parlour to do out, and that bodice to finish and send off by Johnnie Martin, while I shall sit comfortably working at Lady Balmourne's."

The widowed Countess of Balmourne and her daughter, Lady Victoria, lived in a comfortable house in the Gore—comfortable, but by no means gorgeous; for, like other Irish peers, money had not been plentiful to start with, and now there was less than ever. Extravagant habits made it impossible for the present Earl to help his mother; on the contrary, he made strenuous efforts to loosen her purse-strings on his behalf; but this she steadily resisted.

Every economy was practised in the household. No country house was kept, the lady's maid fulfilled the duties of upper housemaid also; but Lady Balmourne considered money well spent that took Victoria into society. She invested all her hopes of earthly happiness in her daughter's marriage.

"Oh, Miss Barnes, are you come? How early you always are!" It was Lady Victoria speaking.

Considering Edith had done a good three hours' sewing, and it was nearly one o'clock, she could not agree with the remark, so she ignored it.

"I had to disturb you, my lady, to ask how long you wish this skirt to be at the back?"

"Only just on the ground. The lace is not mine; aunt lent it to me, so I must be careful, I suppose. Do put your best ideas into it; I'm very particular how it looks!" she said, anxiously. "Hua mamma asked you about the pink satin opera cloak?"

"No, I haven't seen her ladyship this morning."

"Well, I'll come in to you directly."

Edith went back, and with deft fingers arranged folds and bows.

The maid by this time had come to help.

"Got to mind your p's and q's with that dress, Miss Barnes. There would be murder if it didn't fit and go properly. You would never darken these doors again," she sniffed.

"What is there so particular about this?"

"There is a very rich gentleman they want to catch for her. I can't find out his name yet; but her aunt is doing it all, and they have been after him for a long time now."

In came Lady Balmourne, and put an end to gossip.

"Miss Barnes, I want you to take this home with you," pointing to some rich material on the table, "and get some quilted satin to make a long evening cloak for Lady Victoria. Get it done by this day week. She wants it for a very important dinner," and she swept out again.

"Another present from her aunt," commented the maid. "They are trying for dear

life this time. I don't believe she will keep me on, so I'm not going to help."

"I am sure I can't get it done so soon as that," said Edith, shaking her head.

When Lady Victoria came to have the dinner gown fitted her mother came in also. She said to Edith—

"You had better take the bodice of this, as well as the cloak, home with you."

"I should not have time to finish both, my lady," she said quietly.

"I thought the other one helped you?" listlessly.

"We have a lodger now, a nephew and heir to Lord Ardoyne, who lives at Ardoyne House," Edith informed them, proud of her client.

She noticed the mother and daughter exchange looks. With barring cheeks she also felt Lady Victoria's cold grey eyes examine her much more closely than was comfortable. Nothing further was said on the subject; only the maid had orders to sit all day and help, that the bodice might be finished.

"What did they look at each other so funny for?" asked Edith frankly, as soon as Lady Balmourne and her daughter had gone.

"I don't know, but I saw it too, and their black looks at you! I believe they were thinking you a deal too pretty to be with the heir of such a wealthy lord. I was wondering whether your lodger is the very one they are trying to get for Lady Victoria. Everybody knows Lord Ardoyne will never be married."

"They were thinking something, I am sure, by the way they looked at me," said Edith, rather hurt.

"A queer old stick that Lord Ardoyne," said the maid.

"Is he?" interested.

"Hasn't got a woman-servant in the house, and won't have one. James, that I'm engaged to, lives there. He's footman."

"So you know all about it? Go on, tell me."

"Never invites a lady to his house, except once a year, when he gives a great ball. Then all the grandest people in London go."

"What does he do all the rest of the year?"

"Oh! lots of gentlemen go to see him, and he's fond of all those queer things in the Museum. He reads books about them; and James says sometimes the talk at table is just as bad to understand as French, for the long words they use."

"I wonder if he has ever seen our lodger there?"

"I daresay. Tell me what he is like?"

Edith described Mr. Irvine minutely, adding—

"I expect we have seen the uncle in the museum. Kate and I are very fond of going there."

Mrs. Wilfred Irvine had lived at Antrim-square more than a week, when he saw Edith for the first time.

Kate was taking away the tea-things. In doing so she upset a bottle of ink.

"Ink, Edith! ink, upset!" she screamed, losing her presence of mind, and forgetting the exalted rank of the lodger.

But Edith kept steady, though she was thinking only of the new carpet, which took such a long time to buy. She seized a can of water, and, rushing in, held it high in the air, and poured down a sparkling stream over Mr. Irvine's brown leather boots, as well as on the stain; then kneeling down she mopped up the ink; lake with expedition—no mark—not a bit, the pattern out clear and clean, a little darker for the water, but not dirty nor stained. Then with a pleased smile on the pretty flushed face Edith looked up for Kate's word of praise.

She saw, instead, Mr. Irvine's handsome countenance bent with an astonished and gratified expression towards her. Kate saw it too, and was enraged with herself. She had made such fine plans to keep these two apart.

"Who—who could see you and not fall in

love with you, dear?" questioned she in tears, to Edith's amazement, as soon as they and their implements were once more shut into the kitchen. "Oh! be careful, for my sake. I wouldn't trust a fine gentleman like that as far as I could see him. I never meant him to set eyes upon you. I wish he had never come here. I wish you had taken notice of John Sanders, and were safely married to him. But Edith treated the matter lightly, and thought no more about it, except that she carefully avoided Mr. Irvine, to save Kate's feelings.

But he had no regard for those feelings, though he was quite conscious of the difficulties in the way of seeing pretty little Edith.

He determined to frustrate their plans. He chose for his time Sunday morning, as she was coming out of church.

"Good morning, Miss Barnes," and he stood by her side, endeavouring to take her prayer-books to carry home for her.

That she would not allow, and held them firmly, though she could not avoid saying "good-morning," any more than she could help looking an incarnation of all that is lovely, in her pretty pink costume and white sunshade.

"I always see you in church!" he remarked.

"I never see you," she said stiffly.

"I wonder why I am never allowed to speak to you?" he asked, looking at her.

"I didn't know you wanted to," with curt indifference.

"Before I induce you to treat me kindly must I ask your sister's leave?"

"I don't see that it matters how I treat you. People in your rank of life and people in mine don't mix," she retorted, proudly.

"But suppose I am not so high and mighty as you imagine. Would that make you thaw towards me a little?"

"I haven't got to imagine. Looking at you, I can see."

"But looking at you," and he eyed her with approval, "I should say you were a visitor at the palace."

She parted her lips in a little gratified incredulous laugh. Who could help being just a little pleased?

"Now I'll tell you what I really am. I am just a poor stockbroker, a very poor one."

"But you are going to be Lord Ardoyne one day, with ever so much money?"

"Yes, if my uncle doesn't marry."

"You know he won't do that," with a glance of reproach.

"I can only guess. Besides, he may live a great many years; and, as far as I can see, I must go on, poor as I am, till I am too old to care for money. Wouldn't you like to make my poverty a little more cheerful to me while I am here," he asked appealingly.

"No, decidedly not. Kate wouldn't let me."

"Bother Kate. Let her go to—"

"You'll not say anything against Kate while I am here," peremptorily.

"There she is, up at the window, spying on you, as she always does, and looking daggers at me, which is cruel, after the way you are treating me."

"I won't hear a word against Kate. I wouldn't do anything against her wish, whatever you may say."

Kate's true heart was heavy with misgiving at the sight she saw. Oh! how to save her dear Edith. She would be very cross to her—yes, she would. Yet how nice they looked together! Edith quite the lady, and he nearly a lord! Well, that sweet lovely girl was fit to be anybody's wife.

She went down to open the door for them, with a lecture on her lips.

"Well, Miss Barnes, is dinner ready?" asked Mr. Irvine, standing in the doorway so that Edith could not get in.

"No; not for three quarters of an hour."

"Well, now don't you call this exemplary behaviour? I was dying for a little walk with Miss Edith, but I knew you would not like it, so I have brought her home first to ask

if you object to our having a turn in the gardens, as far as the Memorial and back? You can't say no, I'm sure."

Kate smiled. Edith was nodding her head, meaning "say yes, say yes." So there was nothing for it but to give way; so she did so—reluctantly.

And off they went, the elder sister admiring them till her flattened nose would permit of no closer squeezing against the window-pane; then she had to let them pass out of sight.

At that moment John Sanders came round the square, and glanced at the house. Edith met him. He raised his hat and she said,—

"Good-morning."

"Who's that?" inquired Irvine, angrily.

"Mr. Sanders. He's very well off; that big shop in High-street is his," said she, with a cocky air, which translated, ran, "so you see you are not the only man in the world."

"Do you often see him?" He looked searchingly at the pretty girl by his side.

"He comes round our square nearly every day," said she, feeling guilty because of the false impression she was giving Irvine.

"Now, look here, Edith, I want you all to myself. This is no passing fancy of mine. I have been watching you ever since I have been here, so I can't have you speaking to any other fellow. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand. You are worse than Kate, but I shall speak to exactly who I like," impudently.

"No, you shan't. I had trouble enough to make you speak to me; now I'm going to take jolly good care no one else comes poaching."

"And you? I suppose you can walk with whom you choose?" laughing.

"No; that wouldn't be fair. I won't even look at another girl. Will that satisfy you?" he asked.

She blushed and looked down. Her sister had been so watchful that this was the first breath of love-making that had ever blown upon her; she quite lost her composure and ordinary powers of repartee.

"Well, if he means to act up to those high-flown words I don't mind you having a walk with him sometimes," said Kate, mollified when she heard this conversation repeated verbatim; "but it won't be very often, and I shall go with you, except when Mrs. Martin can't come to sit with mother."

CHAPTER II.

So the walks were conducted with rules of the greatest propriety.

Then Wilfred one day discovered Edith was looking pale, and declared she required a walk every evening, whether Kate could come or not, just down the Park; so good for her too—to get a look at the fashions.

Generally, at great personal inconvenience, Kate insisted on accompanying them. Her notions of chaperonage would not have offended a nerve in Mrs. Grandy's delicate organisation; but to-night she could not go. An important piece of work for a new and rich customer was promised the next morning.

"Quite a treat to be out alone with you," exclaimed Wilfred, with a satisfied air.

"I like being alone, too," she acquiesced, shyly. Then with a struggle between her love and her loyalty, "but I never wish Kate away when she is here."

"Let us out across the grass, and go to those seats under the limes; it is quieter up there." He led the way, giving her a hand over the low rail. He could not help noticing how small and neat her shoe was; then glancing at her pretty face he muttered, "By Jove! even if I do one day come into the title she wouldn't disgrace a fellow."

"Do you often go to your uncle's?" she asked, when they were sitting down. "I never hear you speak of him."

"No," he said, with an awkward laugh. "The fact is, I have never seen him. I left a letter of introduction when I came to London, three years ago, but he sent me a most uncom-

plimentary answer, so for the time I am snubbed; but I'll have a go at him again soon. That's why I came here to live."

"But why won't he see you. Have you done anything he doesn't like?"

"Well, no. I will be candid to you. My mother very nearly married him as her second husband, abroad you know—legal there—but at the last he backed out of it. Fact was she went under her maiden-name, and when he found it out he got angry, and has avoided us ever since, but that's years ago now."

"What a pity," she said, slowly.

"I hope you don't mean I am losing any of your favour, through not gaining his?"

"No, indeed," she laughed. "I see so much of the silly, stuck-up ways of rich people we work for that I like you much better when I know your life has nothing to do with them, only I am sorry he judges you without seeing you."

"Spoken just like your sweet self."

There was no one in sight. Taking possession of her little hand, he began,—

"Edith, I have known you now long enough for you to judge me, and I have tried to make you love me, that you might understand how useless my gratified ambition would be without you to share it. Will you marry me one day, dear?"

He looked round at the delicate, mobile features.

"Yes," she murmured, with an effort, and could say no more; but nothing further was necessary. The head hung shyly forward, and a rosy hue spread over her clear complexion.

"Thank you for that word of comfort, darling!" said he, trying to look into her eyes, but the lids were so lowered that the silky lashes and the hot blushes met. "It is only fair to tell you how poor I am. Besides, you would soon find it out; but if you thought you could do on what I have, we might be married at once."

"We need not talk about that yet. Let us tell Kate this first," she answered, softly, and rose to go home.

"No, not back yet," he protested, and guided her steps towards the Row.

A great many carriages were in the park. Edith tried to make careless remarks about them.

But Wilfred would hear none of it. He insisted on talking about themselves. Regardless of passers-by, he looked long and lovingly at the sweet girl, and reiterated, in a low voice, his vows of eternal devotion.

They sat down again, until she said Kate would be wondering where they were, so they really must go home.

There happened to be a break in the line of carriages at that moment. The next one coming attracted their attention, so both stood watching.

An abnormally stout lady had chosen for head gear a bow. The effect was extraordinary, the large body and projecting nose ended so abruptly.

Others were as bonnetless; only on this individual was the surprise so ludicrous. Unfortunately for her, too, by her side, and acting as a pleasing contrast, sat a long waisted, thin girl, wearing an enormous open worked hat.

Edith was on the point of making a remark, when the girl turned her face towards them; then Edith saw it was Lady Victoria, and guessed the other to be the rich aunt.

The little dressmaker would have nodded after this marked attention, and waited, expecting Lady Victoria to take some notice, so long and fixed was the stare. She evidently recognised Edith, and deliberately overlooked her to bestow her glances on Wilfred, also looking, at her side.

"What a handsome girl!" exclaimed he.

"By Jove, she puts everybody in the shade, except the old lady by her side!"

"I know who she is," said Edith, quietly, "I made the dress she is wearing!"

It was rather a shock to be brought so rudely back to realities, when for the time he

was soaring in imagination, among the nobility and gentry. So his face fell, and his conceits were knocked down, as he answered, sadly,—

"Did you? Oh, it was at you she looked. I thought it was me!"

"Perhaps it was," adding to herself, as she glanced at him, "I must say he is very good-looking and showy." The definition would not have pleased him. Though she was so critical she was none the less pleased with her future husband that he was an object of such exalted attention.

"She looks very young," he remarked, thinking still of Victoria.

"Her maid says she is twenty-nine; but she does everything to make herself look younger."

"She succeeds," he said, decidedly. "I should have thought her twenty!"

"Do you think it is nice to go about deceiving people like that?" asked Kate's disciple.

"I daresay she has her reasons," carelessly.

"Yes, her maid says she would give anything to marry. Who do you think she wants? Lord Ardoyne! I only heard that yesterday!"

"The deuce she does!" he exclaimed. "Yes, there is to be a grand fancy ball at his house soon, and she is going!"

"Does he show any signs of liking her? I thought nothing on earth would make him look at a woman again, after being so jolly sold as he was," said Wilfred, with some alarm.

"I don't know. She only sees him at parties. He won't go to their house just for a call, try all they can do, the maid says."

"Oh, that's all you have heard yet?"

"Yes. We must go home now," she cried, "Kate has had to see to mother, put away tea, and do everything by herself!"

"No, don't hurry yet," he said, firmly.

"Why do you want to wait?" she asked, quickly.

"Oh, just to enjoy the air! You sit here and I will go back to the tree where I was—when—when—" he hesitated, not knowing what to say.

"I believe you want to see Lady Victoria again," said Edith, with pain in her voice.

"Well, and what if I do? Women are horribly jealous! I see a striking girl and I am not allowed to look at her! If you wish to keep me in love with you that is not the way to manage it," said he, angrily.

She gave a little sigh, but raised no more opposition. Only she was unhappy to find how soon he wanted to be entertained by someone else; but pride kept up her spirit, and she resolved not to show him what she felt. At length the same carriage passed again. This time both ladies were most marked in their observation of the good-looking man, who stood alone by the tree. He calmly returned their gaze, and was half inclined to raise his hat, but thought better of it.

When they were quite out of sight he went to Edith.

"Come along, then, if you are so anxious to go home. I don't mind going now."

"How they stared the second time, didn't they?" she remarked.

"They will know me when they meet me again!" he laughed, pleased.

"Lady Victoria is to have her aunt's money one day!"

"Ah!"

He was very thoughtful the rest of the way home.

It was not until the next evening, when gradually Edith's beauty put those strong cold eyes out of his mind, that he again said pretty things, and became kindness itself, so that Kate could not find it in her heart to object to such a proper engagement.

A few days after, Lady Victoria came. It was before twelve.

Edith went to her.

"The invitations are actually out for Lord

Ardoyne's ball, the thing of the season, and I haven't even thought of my dress yet!" said her ladyship, yawning as she remembered how early it was. "Such an unearthly hour to be out! Tell me what I had better have, Miss Barnes?"

Then clever little Edith considered a moment, turned over a few leaves of the fashion book before her, and as the most becoming costume for Victoria's long lean figure, suggested,—

"What do you think of a Greek lady?"

"Tell me what it is. I can't bother to read it."

"Soft white woollen drapery, a red cloak edged with gold embroidery, and gold fillets across your hair."

"Yes, that sounds nice. Would it be becoming?"

"Very, I should think, my lady."

"You get all the things, will you? I saw you in the Park a few days ago, who was that standing near you?" asked Victoria, languidly.

"It was Mr. Irvine," blushing redder than any Greek lady's cloak.

"I wondered whether it was. I have been making inquiries about him, and the probability of his inheritance. Does he lodge here now?"

"Yes," Edith answered reluctantly, not enjoying the conversation.

"Does he often go to his uncle's?"

Though Edith tried hard to back out of answering these blunt questions it was no use. A few minutes put the astute Victoria in possession of all the facts, when she said disdainfully,—

"Yes. I have heard all that elsewhere. What time will he be home?"

"About five to-day."

She said nothing for a minute, but she hummed "Lo the Conquering Hero," and was evidently cogitating; then she spoke.

"Now, Miss Barnes, I particularly wish to meet him, so I will be here this afternoon before that. Then as he comes in, I will go out. You see the passage is so dreadfully narrow we shall knock up against each other. As we are squeezing by, you can say."

"This is Lady Victoria Balmourne, Mr. Irvine; but I dare say you have met before. Now say it after me. I want those exact words."

But Edith was silent. With flashing eyes, she answered proudly,—

"I would rather you fixed on some other place to meet him."

"Of course you would, but he doesn't go anywhere," carelessly. "I suppose he is not engaged? Does he leave any love-letters or photographs about, or anything of that sort?"

"We have reason to think he is engaged to be married," she replied, looking down.

"Oh, well, I don't care if he is. I would back myself to win against any woman he is likely to have met in his second-rate set," with a smile of superlative conceit.

"He's not one who would break his word if he has given it," said Edith, valiant for her lover.

"Bah! What do you know of the world? Do as I tell you, Miss Barnes, and though his fiancée were looking on, I will be engaged to him myself in a month—that is, provided all I hear is true."

It was not in malicious cruelty that Victoria spoke. She had no idea of the pain she was inflicting. Intent on her own welfare, the happiness of others did not matter a flip of her finger. It had not entered her head that her dressmaker could be fond of a man it was possible for herself to marry.

Edith immediately went to buy the things for her order. For the first time in her life she found it impossible to tell Kate about this talk. Open air and action seemed necessary to her. Though at first she objected to introducing Wilfred, and meant to use every means in her power not to let them meet, after Lady Victoria's challenge she was anxious to test

his faith, though she risked all earth's happiness by doing it. Still she did not doubt him.

Victoria kept her appointment, and Edith fulfilled her part of the programme.

It gave her a dart of acute pain to watch Wilfred, standing at the door, raise his hat with transparent satisfaction.

"We know Lord Ardoyne so well, you must come and call. Mamma is at home on Fridays."

He readily assented, and they chatted on easily.

Edith knew too little of etiquette to question the propriety of the thing. When they had been talking to each other some time, forgetting Edith, there pranced down the street a fine pair of horses, and the fat figure of the lady with a bow where her bonnet should have been.

They pulled up at Miss Barnes's door, with a great splash.

"Oh, auntie, have you come for me? How good of you!"

"Why, Victoria, I've been looking everywhere for you. I can't think how I missed you. Is that—" she began, and stuck up eye-glasses on two feet of handle, to subject Wilfred to a microscopic investigation.

Of course, the most natural thing in the world was to find him in a second standing at the carriage door talking to the ladies.

Nobody looking on could have guessed how carefully the scene had been prearranged by auntie and Victoria. Poor Edith did not. She looked with wistful eyes at the group, till at last the conversation seemed at an end.

The carriage drove off, and Wilfred ran back all smiles to solemn Edith. Laying both hands on her shoulders, he said,—

"Thanks, dear, for that introduction. It may be the making of my fortune—our fortune I mean, of course," he cried, in the highest spirits.

"I knew nothing could tempt you to forsake me," she whispered, mistaking his excitement for joy at being in her presence.

"Forsake you! What do you mean?" he asked, with a start, and his brow clouded darkly.

"Nothing. I only wondered whether you would think so much of me now these rich people have taken you up," she murmured, softly.

"It all comes natural to me, you see. Though I have never lived in it, their sphere is mine, and what is in the blood is sure to come out!" he exclaimed.

"Will you go and see them?" asked she, anxiously.

"Rather!" he cried. "I want you to put your hat on after tea, and come and show me which house it is. At least, no, tell me. I'll go and find it alone."

Edith felt she would not be wanted, and drew herself up proudly. They stood in the passage.

John Sanders passed slowly, looking straight in. Edith crimsoned in a moment. He took no notice, however, though she fancied his face wore a little disgusted expression.

"That fellow is after you, I am sure," said Wilfred, displeased.

"I have never spoken to him in my life," she answered, shortly.

"You have winked and laughed, I expect," he said, rudely.

She looked angrily at him, not deigning to speak.

"Come now, none of those cross faces for me, or I shall repent of what took place the other night."

"You can repent, but I should not forget," she said, sorrowfully.

"Then give me a kiss, and be nice as you always have been." He bent down; but she drew haughtily back, feeling as though some of the ice from Victoria's steely glances had entered into her soul.

She looked so delicate and drooping as she stood there that all his former devotion kindled up into a flame which burnt out all

remembrance of his exultation at the recognition he had received.

Another moment, and he would have had her in his arms, whether she would or not; but Kate came running downstairs, calling with brisk authority,—

"Now, then, none of that spooning in the passage. Your tea is ready, Wilfred; and, Edith, you have that tea jacket to cut out before I shall allow you to stop work."

"Surely she can come for a walk after tea?" he asked.

"Well, I'm not so sure. She looks very pale. What's the matter, dear?"

"Nothing," said Edith; then she turned and went upstairs to her work.

Kate soon followed. When they were sitting quietly Edith told her sister every word of what had happened, ending with,—

"I have no fear of her taking him away from me, have you, Kate?"

"I should know he wasn't worth keeping if he chooses that cold-hearted, worldly make-up before you, dear; not that I think he will."

"And John Sanders passed and looked in, Kate!"

"There now! If he was the one who had to choose, I know he would keep to his first love."

"Well, he looked quite mockingly at me, so you see he hasn't stuck to me."

CHAPTER III.

A few days after the midday post brought a letter for Wilfred.

He had remained in the wildest of spirits since meeting Victoria; and, though he had been out every evening without asking Edith to accompany him, still, for the short time he was in, she seemed overwhelmed with his endless compliments and the eternal vows he uttered.

The sisters examined this letter. A crest, which certainly did not belong to Lady Balmourne, adorned it. The writing was undoubtedly a lady's, and one which they had never seen before.

When he came in, without waiting to speak a word to Edith, he bounded into his sitting-room, and going up to the little clock where any letters always awaited him, he seized this one, and tore it open eagerly; then, throwing down a card of invitation, shouted,—

"Hurrah! There, Edith, the fashionable world will be at my feet soon! I knew I could make my way if only I once got my foot on the right level!"

Kate came in to know the cause of such excitement. Hearing his words, she demanded, briskly,—

"And who have you to thank for it?"

"That little angel, Edith, of course! Don't be afraid. I never forget an obligation!"

"I don't mean that for a moment. Of course, your welfare means hers."

"Exactly. This is from Lady Victoria's aunt, you see. A dinner party, and I am to meet old Ardoyne there. Rejoice with me! If I play my cards well, there ought to be no more of this detestable old city life for me!"

"You surely don't want to spend the rest of your days in idleness?" asked Edith, incredulously.

"No, no; nothing further from my thoughts. I could employ myself right enough, only he wouldn't care for his heir to be pot-boiling on the Stock Exchange."

"Would he care for you to marry a dress-maker?" asked Kate, severely—Edith had gone away.

"I—well—I shan't ask his opinion. He need never know what she was; I am sure no one would guess."

"Edith would never consent to make a secret of her past."

Kate flounced out of the room, having no patience with his nonsense.

Scrupulously exact in his plain evening dress, Wilfred went to the dinner.

He was chatting to Lady Victoria when Lord Ardoyne came in.

She quietly introduced them, and gracefully drew Ardoyne into conversation with herself and his nephew.

"Pardon the inquiry," said the elder gentleman with a haughty air, "Are your people also living in town?"

"No, no," Wilfred laughed, and shook his head. "I know I shall prejudice myself for ever in your eyes," turning to Victoria, "but the truth is I have left them. I don't like their ways. Afraid I should never like them."

First this announcement seemed to pain and astonish the uncle, but in a moment he said,—

"If this is the case, nothing I could say would alter it. The sooner we become near relations the better. Come and see me to-morrow."

During the evening Lord Ardoyne observed his nephew closely. He was not displeased to see him pay such marked attention to Victoria, nor to find how willing an ear she lent to these advances.

He thought a worse thing might have happened to him than thus easily to light upon his heir without the obnoxious family, which had been the insuperable drawback. There seemed to be every prospect of a suitable match—in point of rank, at least.

The outcome of a long consultation the next day was an arrangement by which Wilfred was to receive a handsome allowance for one year and a half, meantime making his home with his uncle. At the end of that term he would be finally adopted or abandoned, his own conduct to be the pivot on which fortune or failure would turn.

Wilfred shot into a hansom to take the news to Edith. How tiny his old lodgings looked! Not dingy—the sisters were too punctilious in their cleanliness to house a speck of dust; still, he wondered how he had managed to live there until he remembered—as though it had been years ago instead of this morning—that a small rent and grand address had been his first requisites.

The girls received the news in silence, notwithstanding his boisterous joy.

"Don't look so solemn, my pretty Edith! By Jove! you are pretty! I will write and meet you, and come and see you ever so often."

But she turned, and walked back to her work, never waiting to say "good-bye."

She felt as though he had walked into a warm, light room, and had called back to her as he closed the door,—

"Stand out there in the cold a bit, and when nobody's looking I will smuggle you in."

Some days passed, and no letter came. Kate watched with pain, as her sister grew pink till the postman came to their door, then pale as he passed without knocking.

She wished over and over again that she had not been quite so severe about John Sanders, then this sorrow might have been saved the flower she guarded so jealously. Now he hardly ever walked down that way, for there was no one smiling at the window. 'Tis true, when she went into his shop, he served her as though she were royalty, while he ignored Edith, and that was always a suspicious proceeding.

The days seemed to drag so heavily now. None of their bright sunshine seemed to gladden the life of the pretty sister. Kate's every wish was to cheer her. Any little incident that would interest her was eagerly seized upon.

To-night would be the ball at Ardoyne House. Edith had heard from the maid how often Wilfred had been to Lady Balmourne's. A strong desire possessed her to go and see what she could. She told Kate she would give anything to be walking slowly down Piccadilly when the carriages drove up to Lord Ardoyne's.

Kate knew no pleasure, only pain, could come of going so near the fire that she must be scorched; still, any desire of Edith's was to be granted. They accordingly went and strolled up and down. It was later than the

sisters ever allowed themselves to be out. Well muffled in old clothes they stood near the gates, where they could see without being seen. A few loungers hung about also.

Carriage after carriage swept by. They saw lovely and wonderful women alight and pass in. At length Wilfred came out. Coming bare-headed between the rows of servants he stood on the top step. Edith shrank back; she feared he would see her. But he had no eyes for those waifs looking on, but only for this Greek lady now arrived in her trailing draperies. Stepping forward to meet her, he bent down solicitously. The girls could hear their low tones, but no words reached their ears.

"I have seen enough," said Edith sadly, and she took her sister's hand as she had done when they were little girls, and drew her away.

But the latent lion in Kate was roused to unscrupulous action.

She determined to go to Wilfred the very next day, and know what he meant by all this.

With the excuse of some shopping, and dressed in her usual good taste—a dark blue cotton gown, and coarse straw bonnet—she stepped into an omnibus, and got out at Hyde Park Corner.

The servant looked astonished at her request to see Mr. Irvine, and attempted to shake her purpose by suggesting he might be out.

She looked like a lady, so quiet and self-possessed was her manner, and so plain her dress. Yet the proceeding was so strange that, as a well-drilled servant, he was at his wit's end.

When she added,—

"I have come on business. Say Miss Barnes, and I know he will see me."

She was shown into a morning-room, the man concluding she was connected with one of the many charities Lord Ardoyne supported.

A large screen stood round one of the bay windows. Kate fancied she heard the scratch of a pen when she sat down, but Wilfred came in at that moment, saying to the servant just before he closed the door,—

"Where is Lord Ardoyne?"

"In the conservatory, sir."

"Ah! how do you do, Kate; very glad to see you!" said he, cheerfully.

Merely coming to the house had been an ordeal that required all her nerve to carry it through; but to be met like this! It was a piece of insolence that made her palpitate with indignation.

"I have come to ask why you have neglected Edith?" said she, sternly.

"Oh, that's your game, is it! And what right have you to put such a question, I should like to know?"

"The fact that you were properly engaged to her with my knowledge and consent, as a note you wrote to her from your office proves!" she replied, steadily, having rehearsed every word over and over again on the way down.

"You mean to stand by your rights, do you?"

"I don't mean to stand and see you trample on her health and happiness!"

"You think of applying to that most interesting of law-courts, eh?"

"That remark is as insulting to our pride as your behaviour has been!" she retorted, angrily.

"Come now, you haven't hunted me to the earth for nothing."

"No. I want to know when you mean to fulfil your engagement to my sister?"

"Oh, all in good time. I am not married to anybody else yet, am I?"

"I hear you are always to be found near Lady Victoria Balmourne, and considering Edith introduced you to her, and opened the way to your present position, you owe her at least a large debt of gratitude."

"Oh, a debt! I thought it would work round to £ s. d. And what is the figure at which you value her injured feelings?"

"If only I had known you could be so contemptible, you should never have had the chance to wreck my sister's happiness," she said, with deep regret in her voice.

"Spare me the agony, please. Now, you guessed about right. I am generally to be found with Lady Victoria, but as the case stands at present, simply because of this confounded note I am engaged to a dress-maker!"

"Then you wish to have nothing more to do with my sister? To hear this from your own lips is why I have come. Good-morning!"

"Here, stop, not so fast. My fossil uncle is a regular brick. Boys will be boys—I daresay he will stump up. What amount will cancel my obligations to your sister, and buy back that note?"

"Money do you mean? Can you for an instant suppose she would touch a penny from anyone we despise as we do you?" indignantly.

"Take it easy now. I suppose this is all to strain me up to the required sum. Say two thousand, and jolly lucky to get it—that is, if the old boy will pay. But any blackmailing or libel after shall land you in the dock!" he said, roughly.

"Good-morning, Mr. Irvine. I suppose Lord Ardoyne understands his heir as little as you do my sister and myself!"

Though a most unusual place, Lord Ardoyne himself was writing behind the screen when Kate entered. He peeped out, but her back was turned. Before he had time to gather up his papers, Wilfred came in and began to talk.

He determined to remain, meaning to confess his perfidy after. He felt it just and right that he should know all the details of his nephew's affairs. As the conversation proceeded, he sympathized with the troubles of youth, and determined to help Wilfred out of his entanglement.

But when the talk was ended, and his nephew out so sorry a figure in the contest with the girl's nobility, he resolved to hold his tongue and watch the upshot.

By another door he rushed round to the hall in time to see Kate leaving it.

"Who's that, Wilfred? An old flame, eh? Come to participate in your change of fortune? Out with it, my boy!" he said, as they strolled into the study, where the uncle usually wrote.

"May I speak to you perfectly frankly and freely, uncle?"

"It would please me beyond measure."

"Of course I hadn't any money to spare," he began; then went on to say how finding Miss Barnes's rooms, and taking them, he had fallen in love with her pretty sister, and had been coaxed by them into making a formal proposal of marriage.

"And now what is the matter?"

"She does not seem to be more anxious to marry than I am!"

"Then what is it? What did she come for?"

"Why, the usual tale told by people in her class of life, when they get a grip on people in mine!" he observed, grandiloquently. "She means to let me off at a price."

"That's awkward. But will it stop at one payment?"

"Yes, she promises to accept two thousand. I told her it was too much; I couldn't possibly pay it."

"Ah!" Lord Ardoyne was musing as he turned the pages of the *Nineteenth Century*. "I think the best plan would be for me to go off for a year or so, out of the way. I have seen nothing of the world!"

"Ah! You think she would forget?"

"If I pay the sum before I go she might," he said, dismally.

"Well now, suppose I hand you the two thousand for her—will that end it?"

"Uncle, you open a path to eternal peace."

"Don't gush; leave that to women and cats," contemptuously.

"But I must explain my gratitude—words

can hardly do it. The little dressmaker's affair was mere glamour; but, upon my soul, I am now deeply in love."

"Bah!" ejaculated the Baron.

"You may not believe me, but my heart is no longer my own."

"Being a vital organ I should have recommended your retaining possession of it," sarcastically.

"Most *à propos*," laughing; "but, really, Victoria Balmourne has made me lose my head completely. With Edith Barnes paid off I am free to woo and win the desire of my life. Two thousand would do it; but finding it so easy to get she might demand three."

"You had better go yourself and settle it. Would you care to have a lawyer with you?"

"No, no! I feel sure I can manage it all."

"His mother's son," muttered Lord Ardoyne, as Wilfred left him.

Not till dinner time did they talk again. When the servants had gone the elder man remarked, looking up suddenly,—

"I hope you have been successful?"

"Well, only to a certain extent! She demands three!" he answered, with raised eyebrows, giving a doubting glance at his uncle.

"You shall have the cheque to-morrow," came the answer.

"Do you still think it would be wise to have a spell abroad?"

"Are you anxious to go?"

"No, I am quite content here, only I thought if I proposed to Victoria now she might get wind of this transaction, and be afraid."

"No woman with that nose and those glassy eyes could possess fine feeling or affection. Believe it, if she could get your money without you, she would be satisfied! Don't treat her as a sensitive being!"

"Ah, yes! but I should like to secure her title; sounds well; and her knowledge of the world. Why, she is a power in society through sheer skill. See how poor they are, and look at their position. Why, she will make me the most prominent man in the kingdom!"

"Indeed! I have not examined her powers in such detail!" The cutting cynicism of the words were lost on Wilfred's thick hide.

"You think I should risk nothing by proposing before I go abroad?"

"Nothing whatever, as long as you put it in black and white. It might be as well to see a few other people before you put yourself into the hands of the first well-bred woman you know."

"Yes, perhaps so. Paris and Berlin—ay, and New York too—have beauties as clever, I've no doubt."

"You are evidently bent on travelling?"

"I should like a little fling, I must say."

"As you please. When would you like to start?"

"Oh, directly after the levée, if you don't object."

"Just so."

A few mornings after this Lord Ardoyne again chose to write his letters in the shady window of the morning-room.

On the blotting-pad, thrown carelessly down, were two letters. The top one ran,—

"DEAR MR. IRVINE,—My sister says you are afraid the enclosed note could be used to your disadvantage. I send it to you, to set your mind at ease, and to show how little you need fear such conduct from us.—Yours truly,
EDITH BARNES."

One glance, and he had unconsciously read it through. The post-mark on the envelope was two days ago, but Wilfred had not thought it necessary to publish the contents. Perhaps he was waiting to do so when the cheque was handed to him. Ardoyne had overlooked it. Hoping the truth would be told then he calmly took the other note and read it, then contemptuously threw it down, disgusted with the weak-minded effusion of vows so soon to be forgotten.

He uttered an exclamation of anger, saying to himself,—

"To be equal with these debased wretches one must act the part of spy all day long. Then I would rather not be equal with them. Evidently I am being made the dupe again, and I have no doubt that woman is at the bottom of it all. Send Mr. Irvine to me the moment he comes in," he commanded a passing servant.

In a short time Wilfred presented himself.

"Pon my word! You might be a tailor from your get-up!" said Ardoyne. "But it is not your clothes I wish to canvas, only to hear if there is anything further on the part of your lady visitor?"

"None whatever. They definitely accept the proposition. As soon as you give me the cheque I will go there."

At lunch, Lord Ardoyne, having been out the whole morning, passed a cheque to Wilfred, saying,—

"Be sure you make them give you a receipt, and have a proper document drawn up by Lewis."

"Indeed, I will. Dealing with depth of this sort is a dangerous thing."

The next day Wilfred passed the paper, signed in a hand really remarkable for its difference to the writing of the note.

Ardoyne smiled to himself and thought,—

"Shows what a fool they think me, to need so little care to take me in."

CHAPTER IV.

"Does Miss Barnes live here?"

"Yes."

Kate had answered a double knock. She saw Edith give a little start when the knock came, and wondered whether a wild hope of Wilfred returning her note in person presented itself to her drooping sister's thoughts. But the two knocks were different. This one did not threaten to batter in the door.

A gentlemanly looking man stood there—none of your dressed up young mashers, she observed, afterwards.

"I wish, if convenient, to speak to Miss Edith Barnes on legal business. Possibly you are the lady?"

"Oh, no; but I will go and call her."

Hastily whispering to her sister as they came down together,—

"I'll shut the door and listen outside, he may speak more freely. Call me if you would rather have me with you."

She left the two to their *à tête à tête*.

"You must excuse my speaking to the point at once. I have come from a firm of solicitors. I understand you were engaged to Mr. Wilfred Irvine."

"Yes." The girl was of a marble pallor, but proud and self-possessed. None of this was lost on the messenger of the law.

"I believe since he has broken off the match you contemplate a law-suit?"

"No."

"I mean you will charge him with breach of promise?"

"No," with a surprised look.

"Have you never had such an intention?"

"Never."

"Did you never threaten him with this proceeding?"

"Never!" An indignant gleam shot from her large eyes.

"My purpose in coming is to offer you a sum of money in compensation for his breach of contract."

"I don't want any of his money." Slowly from chin to brow, a wave of colour passed across the pale, oval face.

"It is not a matter of wanting his money, but his rectitude could not be satisfied unless you were thus reimbursed, after the loss of your right and proper expectations."

"I tell you, I would never accept a penny from him. If this is all your errand you may as well go at once and tell him so, for you waste time here."

She stood leaning one hand on the table for support; her nerves had been very much tried of late. Then she opened the door. He had no choice but to go.

When he passed Kate, he shook hands with her, saying—

"Your sister is a very fine character."

Kate cordially agreed with that.

The sisters stood talking over the strange visit some moments, then the same knock was repeated—he had come back.

"I see a card in your window. I want apartments myself."

Kate liked his look, but having resolved to house no more marriageable men, hesitated; yet there was a stately manner about him that did not come of age (though he must have been nearer forty than thirty) which pleased her very much.

"I shall be only here occasionally, I travel."

"I see," and she wondered again if it would be wise, deciding there was something quite too grave and reliable about him to bring any sorrow to Edith. She suddenly remembered her own disengaged affections.

"Well, I am away so much, and a fidgety old bachelor when I am home, that you ought to double your price to me," he said, as though it would be a great favour to let him come.

The chance was not to be thrown away, and Edith's health required many little delicacies which would strain their thin purse.

So it was agreed—at the monstrous figure of three guineas a week! The rooms were to be ready for any moment he came in, and a cup of *café noir*.

"Then," said he, "I have a request which I fear you will not grant. My eyes are not strong; when I am here I should like, for about half-an-hour in the evening, to have the newspaper read to me. Is that impossible?" with grave solicitation.

"Not at all. On your terms you have a right to ask for what you like, I think. We must have references," said Kate.

"Oh, gracious! I can't give you any references—nobody knows—ah, of course, my solicitors! Kindly give me a pen. Write or call at this address, and I feel sure you will be satisfied. I am prompt in my transactions," he observed, quietly, laying down three golden sovereigns and three shillings by their side. "My name—well, my name is Montagu Irvine. Now I prefer to drop the Irvine. Just Mr. Montagu. Do you see? And your sister need never be pained by hearing the other name. It might awaken memories when you least thought it."

When he was gone the two girls danced a little impromptu minuet.

"Now, Edith, we will go to the Albert Hall to-morrow. Mene Patti is going to sing. I haven't forgotten how much you wanted to hear that concert after all Lady Victoria's talk about it."

"And you shall have that sweet grey bonnet you fancy at John Sanders', and I'll trim it for you. Do you think we could afford some hot cakes for tea? I don't feel hungry for plain bread-and-butter, do you?"

"Of course we can afford it, Edith. I believe in that motto, 'Heaven helps them who help themselves.'"

"You don't think, do you, that, as I would not take any money, Wilfred was waiting round the corner and sent him back here to lodge, Wilfred paying the three guineas?"

"No, that I don't. All he remembers you for is to try and forget you; and the sooner you can make up your mind to do the same the happier you will be."

When they were buying the bonnet Mr. Sanders himself hurried forward; the assistant went at once to show the goods. He waited near. Edith looked at him twice. She could not help noticing it was Kate, not herself, who drew his attention.

Then the shade of ribbon was selected.

"Take it to the milliner," he said to the assistant; and to Kate, "There will be no charge. I will see it is sent to you immediately."

An hour afterwards the bonnet came home. Edith employed that hour with teasing Kate in the most unmerciful manner. As they lifted it carefully out, a pair of gloves of the exact shade, and a little silk *crêpe* handkerchief embroidered in rose colour, fell out.

"Now I'll be the dragon," laughed Edith. "Do you think I am going to have these giddy boys running up and down our square to get a peep at you? Not likely, indeed. My turn to lecture now. Oh, you deepest and shyest of prim and proper sisters!"

Kate took Edith in her arms, delighted to see her so bright again.

"Dear," he sees it's no use trying to get you till he has soft-scaped me," she said, and she believed it.

Mr. Montagu, as a lodger, proved very different to Wilfred. He had a way that made them feel at ease in his presence from the very first evening. He never came home until nine or half-past, and by that time the girls had folded up their sewing.

It gradually became the usual thing for one sister to take whatever book or paper he brought with him while the other prepared the coffee. Then he declared one of his bachelor eccentricities was never to take anything which was not shared by others.

At first he came once a week, then gradually oftener, till at last he never missed coming home for an evening. He would throw himself into his chair with a satisfied sigh, as though he had done a hard day's work, saying—

"If you knew the number of engagements I give up for this refreshing hour by your fire-side!"

Kate began by rigorously doing all the reading herself. She knew too well how soothing to a tired head was the dulcet cadence of Edith's soft voice. But unconsciously they slipped into the habit of either taking the book, while the other, at Mr. Montagu's request, at once seated herself, for he would not sit while one of them stood.

One evening, coming in, he carelessly tossed an exquisite cluster of *stephanotis* on the table.

When Edith saw this she pushed away the books and papers, took a little vase, and, having filled it with water, carefully put the delicate flowers in with a movement so tender it amounted to a caress. She smelt its liquid scent, then asked—

"Would you mind if I take this up to mother? She would be so pleased."

Mr. Montagu watched the action with his tall head bent, and his stern face relaxed into something more like a smile than Kate had seen before. With troubled face she was observing his interest.

After that evening a bouquet, large or small, always came in with the books.

Edith's love of flowers had long ago made her *au fait* with the price. Picking up a crimson and purple orchid, she said, one day—

"Why, Mr. Montagu, these are marked a guinea each in a shop in Bond-street!"

"And not half good enough for my kind friends at any price!" he said, with his usual grave air, that brooked no contradiction.

The two girls began to look upon him as a brother, and to dread the day when any cause would make him leave them again.

He took them through the houses at Kew one day, enjoying it quite as much as they did, then stood talking under the palms.

He said to Edith—

"Would you like to have a place like this at your own home, that you could walk in when you felt inclined?"

She looked up at him doubtfully; she could hardly imagine it.

"Say you were a nurseryman, for instance!" he smiled.

She wondered whether he was in that line, and asked hesitatingly—

"Wherever do you get all your lovely flowers from?"

"Now shall I tell you? Pardon me for mentioning the subject; but you know I had the

great pleasure of first meeting you on business for—Mr. Irvine, so you see I also know Lord Ardoyne very well. He has the biggest thing in the way of greenhouses to be found in London. Would you care to see it?"

"That I should! What is it like?"

"The whole of the garden behind has been roofed in with glass, so that he can be among bright plants with his dull books, and the weather need make no difference. It is a winter garden, copied from one in Russia he liked."

"I should very much enjoy seeing it."

"Well, he would be very much pleased to see you there. He is as fond of flowers as you are."

"Oh, I don't want to see him!" alarmed.

"I don't want to go, thank you!"

"Very well. Shall we go when he is not at home?"

So the week after found Mr. Montagu taking the two girls through those great gates. The servant who opened the door took no notice whatever of them. He merely made as much room for them to enter as the hinges would allow. Then going before them across the softly-carpeted hall he threw aside a *portière*, and opened a door that landed them on the threshold of fairyland.

Of all the exquisite blossoms Edith ever saw! of all the intoxicating perfumes a million flowers could breathe forth! Little crystal fountains, tall drooping tree-ferns, luxurious lounges, and cosy corners, where books and writing-tables invited you to be at home. It all met her eye in bewildering confusion.

Mr. Montagu seemed to notice nothing unusual in the place. Moving a chair forward, he said—

"Won't you have some fruit?"

There was a great heap of fat crimson strawberries—at this time of the year! The probable price made Kate shudder; rich, yellow cream stood there too.

"No, thank you!" Edith shook her head.

"Why, you are so fond of them, I heard you say so!"

"I would if Lord Ardoyne gave them, don't you know!" she explained.

"I assure you he himself ordered them," said he, with a little smile.

Then they sat and crushed the juicy berries, while on one side dripped a little fountain, on the other a glowing brazier found a place on one of the Persian rugs thrown here and there, and tiny birds of brilliant plumage flattered about them.

Edith had no words to express her admiration. She could only look about her in grave and happy wonder.

"I should like to come again one day," she sighed.

"You shall when you like," he said, eagerly. Kate noticed this, because Mr. Montagu's voice was always a pleasing, monotonous sound, quite without emotion.

"What a strange man he must be to live in a lovely place like this and hate women!" said Edith, thoughtfully. Then pointing up, "Now I should have thought a man who would care to look at a lovely little bird like that, and sit among sweet plants, would be the very one to want women about him, to be kind to him, and have a lovely wife to make his home bright."

"I will tell you what very few people know. He doesn't like the—at least, at one time, he hated the very thought of being married, because he happened to know a widow years ago—such an ugly wretch she was too, and in spite of all he could do pursued him, and that creature nearly married him, quite against his will—quite, I assure you; and when she found nothing on earth would make him marry her, she rifled his pockets, and made him pay hard. That's why I thought you—well, what is the use of disturbing stagnant water."

"And are you sure he will never be married?" she asked.

"No, I am not quite sure," he answered,

gravely, as he looked down on the slender, tasteful figure among the flowers.

"Lady Victoria Balmourne wanted to marry him if she could."

He threw back his head now, and laughed aloud. They had never known him do this before.

"Did she? How very amusing, and what made her relinquish her quest?"

"She found out there was no hope of his ever getting married; so—so—you know who she got then?"

"Yes, yes. I don't expect she cared two straws for Ardoyne himself, nor does anybody else. He's just cursed with this money. Everybody has got to know now that he is not to be caught. But, do you know, Miss Edith, if he ever did take a fancy to a wife, she would have to be some one just like you, who thought lightly of gold, and would take him for himself."

"I wouldn't have him if he asked me," said she, laughing, as she dipped her finger, and tried to touch a gold fish. "I have done with such as consider themselves above me for the rest of my life. Mind, I don't think them above me, because I wouldn't do the mean things that they would."

"You are quite right."

He stood looking down at her, his deep-set eyes and fine features gathering an expression that made him still more handsome, as he gazed with longing at the lovely girl.

"I never saw a softer yellow rose than that," said she, turning the conversation, as she looked up into the heart of a drooping bud.

In a moment he picked it, but so hastily that he tore a branch of the tree away from the trellis.

"He will be angry!" she cried, in consternation.

"Oh, no, you can have any flowers you wish, only show them to me."

"They are not yours," said she, reproachfully, "so I am not going to take them."

"I am at liberty to pick exactly what I like here," he assured her, with a little amused look, that so often brightened his handsome, grave features now, when he looked at her.

"I quite believe every word you say. I don't think you would deceive, just to make yourself look grand to me. I should very much like to have some flowers, please. This and this," she pointed to several.

"Would you care to go over the house? though there is nothing much to see."

"I should. Wouldn't you, Kate?" but she was busy examining the scant corks and moss home of an exotic.

When she came back they found their way back to the hall again. A portly, pompous butler was going to open the door.

"No, I will open the doors," said Mr. Montagu, stepping before him.

"What time do you wish—" began the butler.

"Just keep out of the way, can't you. Haven't you heard my orders?" said Mr. Montagu, with imperious authority, though he did not raise his voice a semitone.

Edith was surprised to hear him quash such a grand person as the butler thus easily.

The drawing-room was a dream after Watten's own heart, the crinkled gilt and rich damask, all uncovered, were a revelation to Edith, while the expanse of mirror and chandelier reflection filled her with awe.

Her little feet sank into the carpet, and her eyes lost themselves in the vistas of the park views painted on the panels.

"Are you pleased with this?" he said, looking at her.

"I don't think I should ever be happy again if I had to live here—and—I might have had to, you know. I am so thankful we can be quiet and happy as we like."

"Ah! money and misery—poverty and peace. So it is," he murmured.

"You have never seen real poverty, or you would not say that," Kate objected, with a shake of her head.

By-and-by they reached a room, which he explained was Lord Ardoyne's study.

"I like this," said Edith, and she settled in a huge soft arm-chair. "I could be quite happy here."

"Oh! isn't this exactly like Edith, Mr. Montagu. Do come and look!" said Kate, as she examined a life-size head, in delicate water colours, which was hung to face any one sitting at the writing table.

"Do you think it is?" he asked, and he swept his moustache with the whole of his left hand in great perplexity, saying under his breath, "Caught like a rat in a trap. Curse my stupidity."

"Why, I can see it is like me," said Edith, running forward, "only prettier than I am."

"Oh no, no! That's just where it fails. Hasn't fixed the full beauty of your fresh expression," he observed dreamily comparing the two.

Then he bolted from the room into a picture-gallery, and when they followed talked incessantly, till he hoped their attention was distracted.

Turning to Edith he said, in his even tones,—

"So you would not like to live in this house, Miss Edith?"

"No—yes, I should like to live here in one way. If Kate, or anyone I loved, were happy here, I could come and be happy, too, you know; but I would rather be exactly as we are," she observed lightly.

CHAPTER V.

"KATE! look! here's John Sanders again. Why that's twice to-day, and look at him screwing up his moustache. I declare it has grown a lot, but he will have it out by the roots if he doesn't take care. Why! Kate! He's coming in here!"

And, sure enough, a good firm rat, ta, tat, tat left no doubt about it.

"You had better go yourself, Edith."

"Indeed I won't," indignantly, "and you can say I will never have him, the very first thing."

Kate ran down.

"How do you do, Miss Barnes?"

It was hard work to be natural, Kate found, knowing how disappointed he would be.

After a good deal of humming and hawing and an artistic observation about the weather, John Sanders came to the breach, like a man.

"I have noticed you and your sister a long time," he began.

"Yes. Edith was engaged to the gentleman who lodged here, you know."

"So I heard. But I believe it has been broken off?"

"Yes," said Kate looking down, and wondering how he would take his no.

"The gentleman who is here now seems the right sort; but, as far as I can see or hear, he has not paid any attention—eh?" He hesitated.

"Any attention to Edith?" She helped him. "None whatever."

"Nor to you either, I suppose?" with a little awkward smile.

"Oh, of course not; and though Edith is very pretty and winning, she is not half so merry and friendly with stranger, as you might think. She does not care for gentlemen, not a bit."

"Indeed. The truth is, I have had the offer of a partnership in a thriving wholesale firm in Liverpool, and a very favourable opportunity of selling my business here. So I mean to do this. Excuse my troubling you with my affairs, Miss Barnes; but I feel I could not leave London without taking my wife with me, and there is only one woman I have ever fancied. So I have come straight to you to ask a question. I must put it bluntly. You have never given me a chance to break it gently, and I am sure I have tried often enough."

"Oh, don't say any more—don't say any

more," cried Kate, holding up a warning hand. "Nothing in the world you could say or do would make her have you. Please spare me the pain of saying it again."

Edith sewed on and on, looking at the clock now and then.

"Ten minutes—quarter of an hour—half an hour. Whatever can they be talking about!"

One whole hour went by, then the door was gently opened. Edith sprang to see if he were going. With head thrown well over the banisters she heard and saw a kiss—a distinct, vibrating kiss! Such a light came into her eyes because of Kate's happiness, and she mused,—

"How conceited of me! Why it's been Kate all the time, of course. She's heaps nicer than I am."

When Kate came back Edith was stitching demurely, waiting to hear what her sister would say.

"We made a mistake, Edith, dear. He didn't come to ask for you." Then something seemed to stick in her throat, and she could not get out another word.

"As though I hadn't guessed! Why, you've been down there ages," laughed Edith; and she jumped up, knocking over the kitten, cottons, buttons, and thousands of things in her headlong rush to her sister's arms. Then they both cried and laughed by turns, Edith gulping out, "Oh, I'm so glad," when her sobs or smiles would let her.

When they grew calm once more Edith demanded a verbatim report of all that had happened.

Kate began fairly, and got on as far as where she tried to stop him proposing for Edith; but, to the listener's bitter disappointment, not all her entreaties could drag another word from Kate after that.

Of course their tongues went a great deal faster than their needles. Then came a consideration of Mr. Montagu, for John Sanders proposed being married in two months' time at the very latest, when he would leave for Liverpool.

"So hard to tell Mr. Montagu, said Kate."

"You must say it dear, I never could. I will go out with the coffee as soon as we have finished; then you tell him, and come out to me, for I should get so red and look so silly if I went back then."

So that night, as usual, in came the lodger, laid down a bunch of velvety roses before Edith, threw his books on a chair, and murmured,—

"Here only have I perfect happiness and rest."

The sisters, once hearing it, looked at each other, then sorrowfully at him.

The reading began. Edith asked a question on the subject. It involved a long explanation from Mr. Montagu, but he seemed pleased to give it, and delighted to observe the intelligence with which she received it.

"Why, Miss Edith, you are becoming quite a blue-stocking! Few ladies of your youth in London would be able to fathom these depths. By-the-bye, and his face lost the light it had gained in speaking to her before, "I hear Mr. Irvine has proposed to Lady Victoria Balmourne, and she has accepted."

"Her maid said yesterday there was a letter from him. How glad I am we found him out in time," said Edith thoughtfully.

"I am glad to see that wound healed," remarked Mr. Montagu gently.

"Oh, quite," she smiled. "I am sure my pride was hurt more than anything else, because when I think of him now it is only to be thankful for my lucky escape."

The reading over, Kate gathered the cups, and walked out with the coffee-tray.

"Mr. Montagu," began Edith nervously, toying with one of the roses, "I am afraid we shall have to part. Kate and I are—oh, so sorry—but it can't be helped."

"You haven't found out anything? I haven't done anything or said anything to wound you, I trust?" He jumped up much agitated.

"No, no. It is because we like you so much that we are so sorry. But the reason is a nice one. I am sure you will be pleased. Kate, dear Kate," said she, lovingly, "is going to be married to Mr. Sanders in two months' time!"

"What! You don't mean it! This is more than a coincidence," he said, in jerks. "Well, Miss Edith, I am getting old—thirty-eight, not far from forty, you see—besides being preternaturally solemn for my years. And you—why, you are not twenty-three yet. I have plenty of money—all the material possessions the world can give me, so to speak—but no happiness, except when I am here. Now do you understand what a thunderclap your news is to me?" He sank back in his chair, and shut his eyes for a moment.

"I am sorry," she said, tenderly. "You have always been so good to us."

"And where will your mother live?" he asked.

"She is to go to Liverpool, and be with Kate always. Mr. Sanders was so thoughtful."

"And you as well, I suppose?"

"Oh, no. They have asked me, but I wouldn't be dependent upon anybody," she cried, proudly.

He smiled. Looking down at her sweet, resolute face and enjoying its rare beauty under this defiant expression, he asked—

"Are you going to fight the world single-handed?"

"I am quite able to take care of myself," she replied, firmly.

"But if Wilfred had not turned out such a scamp"—he ground his teeth—"you wouldn't have minded depending on him."

"That would have been different. But I expect—with a toss of the head—"he would have wanted all his money for himself, and I should work just as hard as I do now."

"I am glad to find your common sense allows you to see him in his true colours. I'm afraid he's no good. I asked your opinion of him just now for a definite purpose. I wanted to see whether you regret him. I'm sure you don't."

"Not a bit," she laughed, shaking her head.

"Will you come and sit in this low chair?" said he, pointing to where she usually sat when she read to him.

She obeyed. Clapping her hands before her, she gazed absently at the roses. She was thinking how different her life would have been but for that meeting with Lady Victoria, and she lifted up her heart in thanks that she had been saved from a life with Wilfred. She knew, sooner or later, she must have despised him.

"A penny for your thoughts," he said, quietly.

She told him it was only the same thought over again, confiding in him with all the simple trust she would have had in an elder brother.

"But, maiden fair," said he, caressingly, laying his hand on the mass of soft hair, "I should never have seen you but for that. I wonder if you would have been willing to go through that trial had you known the solace it would bring my lonely heart to find you and your noble sister, and to have some of the fragrance of your lives shed on mine?"

She looked round at his handsome, thoughtful face with infinite compassion, saying softly,—

"Yes, I would—I would, indeed."

"You embolden me to test your forbearance further." Then he hesitated, with a questioning look into her truthful eyes. "Do you think you could let me take care of you, child? One hears plenty of cant about May and December—but have the blossoms and berries such a bad effect on one's bush? Isn't it of much more importance to have kindred spirits than birthdays on the same date? You look frightened, child? I am pleased to see I have taken you by surprise, but I'm half afraid the thought is impossible to you." He

bent down, looking anxiously at her. "Tell me, is there any chance?"

But she only laid her small head against his shoulder as to a haven of rest; and though she hid her face in that moment, a great smile of triumphant joy broke on his grand features. He took her in his arms, without a doubt that he had won his prize.

"My darling! my little pet! you make me from a miserable man into the happiest of mortals! What remains of my life—"

He could say no more. She quickly laid her hand over his mouth, saying,—

"If ever you say that sort of thing again I shall go away from you and never, never come back. Such nonsense, to pretend you are old! I believe it's only to make me say you are not. Why, you haven't a grey hair! Most men at thirty-eight think they are beginning their career."

"Are you always going to comfort me so? If you do you will possess the power that Madame Rachel pretended to, and keep me young for ever. So I will be your dutiful servant always."

"I would rather have you for my master," she said, with pride.

The number of other foolish things they said took such a time that Kate, growing tired of coughing loudly, and knocking things down, boldly called Edith several times—with no result. Then, crimson though she was, nothing remained but to go in.

And then she saw—well, something that made her shut the door quietly, and run upstairs to old Mrs. Barnes, and about in her poor dull ears all the good fortune that had befallen her daughters and herself, when the old lady, instead of being glad, grumbled very much at being disturbed so late, and went off to sleep again without a word of congratulation.

The two months seemed to slip by like water through your fingers. Indeed, when the day that had been fixed for the double wedding arrived, not half the things had been done which they intended.

It was arranged that Mrs. Martin should take up her abode at one, Antrim-square, during the honeymoon.

It was the simplest of ceremonies at St. Mary's.

Mr. Montagu felt it a little difficult to explain to Edith why he had not told her his name was Irvine from the first. At any rate, it was too late to resent it now, except by a pout, and a resolve to call him Mr. for at least six months after they were married.

Mr. Sanders found a splendid old country seat about an hour's journey from Liverpool, Stromford Park. Edith admired it very much, her husband said,—

"You like this place, my darling? Three such homes will be yours."

She did not know what he meant, but she was too satisfied with the present to inquire into the future.

They decided to go abroad, at Edith's wish. In Paris they found life very bright and very enjoyable. One day they were driving in the Bois together.

"Why, that's Wilfred!" cried Montagu, "on that splendid Arab. What a figure he must have paid for it! And the money! bah! what a hound!"

"I should not think he is overdoing it, dear!" said Edith. "You know he's a Baron's nephew, and one day he will be Lord Ardoynes. Everyone knows how rich his uncle is. Just think of that home!"

"Ah, well, Lady Ardoynes!" he said, smiling at the entrancing beauty of his wife. "Would you like to have owned that proud name, little one?"

"No, no!" she said, shaking her head. "I am so happy with you that I want nothing in the world. Lady Ardoynes!" she murmured, proudly throwing back her head. "Of course it does sound magnificent, but I want nothing to do with such things!"

He had several times tested her thus; but she always spurned riches and rank. He felt he

had now gradually brought her to look with less abhorrence on such a position.

That night after dinner she was sitting to read at his side—the old habit continued—he interrupted her, laying his hand against her cheek.

"I have a confession to make, my darling!" She looked round at him.

"The fact is, I have married you under false pretences!"

She would have been frightened but for the reassuring smile on his face.

"What do you mean?" she asked, puzzled.

"What is your husband's name?"

"Montagu Irvine!" still wondering.

"Yes, and you will find it if you look here!" pointing to an open page of *De Brett*. "That name carries with it the alias I have to confess to you, Lord Ardoynes," putting his arm around her. "Forgive me of your charity!"

"What, what do you mean, dear?" she asked, with the first troubled look on her brow he had seen for many a day.

"Good-bye, sweet Mrs. Montagu Irvine!" He kissed her. "How do you do, Lady Ardoynes?" He kissed her again, and kept her in his arms, though she put up both hands to push him back, with an indignant face.

"I will stand no nonsense of that sort," he cried. "You really have been very tiresome to hoodwink—such a bother I have had to keep it from you; and now please to shower on me any number of kisses, and thank me for my labours."

"But I don't believe any of this," she retorted. "Why did you ever come to one, Antrim-square, in the first place?"

"Simply to make a substantial apology for the scurvy tricks of my nephew; and when you wouldn't have it I had to arrange it by weekly instalments, and but for your obstinacy in refusing a lump sum I should have escaped being obtained in the bonds of matrimony by you—you little wretch! And you—you would have escaped being married under false pretences to a man with an alias."

"Why didn't you tell me before?" she pouted, though she no longer tried to get away.

"I should not have told you yet, but, you see, Wilfred is here, and we must dodge him. I have reasons for not wishing him to know I am married."

The next day Edith was sauntering down the stairs of the hotel buttoning her long glove. She was loitering till her husband should overtake her. They were going for a walk in the Champs Elysées.

Instead of her husband, another gentleman came behind her, raised his hat, saying,—

"Surely I am not deceived. Miss Barnes! I thought it was you passing my door."

She turned quickly. Very charming she looked in a simple gown of mauve-coloured camel hair. The great sleeves and tiny bonnet were finishing touches to the lovely picture of her face and figure.

"I saw your sister's marriage in the paper. I suppose you are staying here with her? Go back and say you are with me—they need not hurry."

She went back, and rapidly told her husband what had happened.

"Go just the same, darling. See how the hound will treat you. He may, at least, crave your pardon. It shall be a last trial for his income. I will keep you in sight."

She soon joined Wilfred again.

"I heard some talk last night of a lovely English girl in the hotel, but I can't be bothered with looking over names, so I didn't know I had the pleasure of her acquaintance," he began.

"Have you heard from Lady Victoria lately?" she asked, coldly.

"I have, but I never want to hear of or from her again. Imagine how uncongenial a subject she is with you at my side!"

"I am sorry to hear you say this. It is an accepted fact in London that you are going to be married."

"Ah! She has given that out, has she? Now this is exactly what happened. She was the only woman I could see to suit me at the time, so I wrote, saying if we were both of the same mind when I return I should ask her to be my wife. But I haven't done it yet, you understand. Heads or tails, I win, is my motto."

"At the same time it leaves no doubt in her mind that you are going to."

"That doesn't follow, if I happen to see any one nicer. I am not tied to her apron strings."

"That would be most ungentlemanly!" indignantly.

"No good saying that. I am in love—always have been, in fact. You are the fair object. Will you listen to the renewal of my suit? This is hardly the place, I know, but—"

"I would thrash you if I were a man!" she retorted, angrily.

"I won't be spurned by your crudity. The sight of you makes me long for you more than ever."

Her lip curled in scorn. At that moment a voice from someone jealously watching behind.

"Are you enjoying your visit to Paris? It's some months since I have heard from you!"

Before replying, Wilfred whispered hastily to Edith,—

"I'll see you again by-and-by. I must leave you now."

And familiarly linking his arm in his uncle's he turned back the way they had come, Edith keeping them in view.

She had seen Lord Ardoyne angry before, but when she reached her rooms he was soothing with fury. No inventive seemed strong enough to hurl at his nephew.

"My brother, at seventeen, married an actress ten years older than himself," he exclaimed. "This reptile in man's shape is only the natural result of such an union!"

Then while he rejoiced he was in a position to shield Edith, he flashed with shame at having such a contemptible sounder for his relation. He vowed he would cast him off for ever.

Then he told Edith what their conversation had been, when linked arm-in-arm they made their way back to the hotel in her sight.

"Who was that girl I saw you with as I came up?"

"Oh, that! That's a very nice little girl I picked up in London—not the sort a fellow would marry, don't you know; merely *pour passer le temps*, though she's horribly respectable!"

"I see no reason why you shouldn't marry her," said Lord Ardoyne.

"Ah! well, a fellow expects a lift up in the world from his marriage, or he wouldn't be bothered with a wife."

"How about Victoria Balmourne?"

"Yes, I intend to marry her!" he said, resolutely.

"I came to speak to you on the subject."

"I'm not in such a hurry as all that," protested Wilfred.

"Her aunt died yesterday, I see. She is now in possession of a modest fortune."

"That alters the case," he said, sharply.

"You have not forgotten the time of your probation is rapidly passing?"

"No, indeed. I use every endeavour to act the part and live the life of an honourable gentleman. That, if you remember, was to be the standard by which you would measure me."

"Now," said Lord Ardoyne, when he had repeated this conversation, "I wish him to know I am married, and from your lips. He always goes out about seven, I find. You can easily see him. I will be near, my darling!"

Accordingly, Edith was again on her way out, just as Wilfred was.

"Delighted to see you again!" said he, greeting her with warmth.

"I simply wish to ask whether you have any news from your uncle?"

"Why, yes; he's all right. I only wish he wasn't."

"Perhaps you do not know he is married?"

"Married! Heavens! no, it can't be true."

"I'm perfectly certain of what I tell you."

"By Jove! does anybody know he's gone and made such an old fool of himself? Why, I was going to propose to you."

"No one knows he is married yet."

"That's a good thing. I'm awfully sorry, but for a second time," a diabolical grin. "I must throw you over, and rush into the open arms of Victoria Balmourne. I am off at once, before anybody else gets scent of this tragedy. Ta! ta!"

He went to the enriched Victoria; explained to her mother that his uncle was deeply anxious he should travel in both continents of America, while he himself felt unable to quit England without the consolation of his heart's desire.

Fortunately for Lady Balmourne's pocket their deep mourning rendered ostentation impossible, and the chance of quickly uniting Victoria to a man who would be the matrimonial prize of next season was too good to be lost.

They were staying in the country, their house in London having been advantageously let for a year. So the whole affair was arranged with all despatch.

Wilfred then took his bride to New York. Much to her disgust he stayed there, and made ducks and drakes of her sovereigns, till one day an English paper from her mother arrived, with great scorchings on each side, of the announcement of the birth of a son and heir to Lady Ardoyne.

It nearly sent her into a fit. There was no rest nor reason for Wilfred until he consented to return to London. Once arrived there the very next morning she made her way to Ardoyne House, followed by her unwilling husband.

They were shown into the morning-room.

The picture that met their eyes was Edith and Kate, both engrossed in the contemplation of a bundle of delicate lace and muslin, with a tiny pink face peeping out.

"Oh! hope and joy of the house of Ardoyne," Edith was laughing to him.

Victoria gave one glance, and started back.

"What! are you Lady Ardoyne? It is a judgment from Heaven on me." She threw up both hands, and collapsed into the nearest seat screaming.—

"Wilfred! Cruel! Unkind! How you have betrayed me!"

"Pray collect yourself," said he, sternly.

"I don't understand in what way you are betrayed," said Edith.

"He knew it all the time," pointing to Wilfred, "and I am married to him!"

"And did you not mean to marry him?" asked Edith, calmly.

"I meant to marry Lord Ardoyne's heir, not his pauper nephew," she cried.

"The difference is," said Kate, "instead of his giving you a helping hand to the good things of this world you have given him one."

"That is just what I did not mean to do," and Lady Victoria gnashed her teeth.

The door opened, and Lord Ardoyne entered. Grave, but a brightness in his eye and a spring in his step that had come with his sweet wife, he said,—

"Ah, Wilfred, I heard you were here. You must know by this time that I am aware of too many things in your past to continue your allowance, sorry as I am at your distress, Lady Victoria."

She glanced at him, purple with rage.

"I nearly married you myself," she hissed.

"You haven't known me in vain, uncle, if I saved you from that," said Wilfred.

"Pon my word, it almost inclines me to continue your allowance as a reward," said he, in a low voice, "a reward for having delivered me from that lady, and thrown me in the path of my young and charming wife."

Edith, my love, say good-bye to these my relations, for I desire that you meet them no more under any pretext. Your purity shall not be sullied!"

[THE END.]

FACTILE.

—O—

"Is drowning painful, doctor?" "Very. Particularly after you have been pulled out and are being resuscitated with a barrel."

A GREAT BREAK.—"This ain't a dwarf! He's over five feet tall." "That's the great thing about him. He is the tallest dwarf in the world."

He (cautiously): "What would you say, darling, if I should ask you plumply to be my wife?" Darling (even more cautiously): "Ask me and find out."

HUSBAND (to extravagant wife): "You have succeeded at last in making something out of me." Wife: "I knew I would." What is it, dearest? "A pauper."

ELDER SISTER: "Oh, you fancy yourself very wise, I daresay, but I could give you a wrinkle or two." Younger Sister: "No doubt—and never miss them."

DUDE (to hotel clerk): "I have an idea." Clerk: "Quite so. Well, we have a safe here for the use of guests who wish to store their valuables. Did you bring it down with you?"

SOLDIER: "If it came to war I couldn't shoot anybody to save my life." Civilian: "Have you got such a heart?" Soldier: "Not much, but you see I only lost a bugle; couldn't shoot anybody with that."

MRS. GADD: "Yes, my daughter appears to have married very happily. Her husband has not wealth. It must be admitted, but he has family." Mrs. Gadd: "Yes, I heard he was a widower with six children."

HARRY SIMPKINS isn't very brilliant in conversation, is he? said one young woman to another. "No; but he said something quite new at about ten o'clock last night." "What was it?" "He said, I think I'll have to go."

PERHAPS the most trying experience in the career of a maiden who has passed the first blush of romantic girlhood is when she braces herself to meet the shock of a proposal of marriage from some man and the shock doesn't come.

CLARA (eulogizing the new rector): "He is superbly eloquent. Why, he can move his hearers to tears." Hantiboy (who is not eloquent): "A paltry accomplishment. I scorn proficiency in an art in which every anneeze is my equal and every peeled onion is my superior."

JOHNNY DUMPSEY: "Oh, ma! I wish you would make me a pair of home-made trousers every day." Mrs. Dumpsey (much gratified): "Why, darling?" Johnny Dumpsey: "Because the scholars all laughed at me so to-day that the teacher had to excuse me, and I've had a jolly time fishing with Bill Peck."

"Do you think your sister likes me, Tommy?" "Yes. She stood up for you at dinner." "Stood up for me? Was anybody saying anything against me?" "No, nothin' much. Father said he thought you were a good deal of an ass, but she right up and said you wasn't, and told father he ought to know better than judge a man by his looks."

SCENE: Grandpapa's Study. Tommy departing for school. Grandpapa (producing a sovereign for the tip): "And remember, my boy, that whatever is worth doing at all, is worth doing well. Throw your whole heart into every lesson. Never rush at a thing. A good old proverb tells us 'What's done in a hurry, is never done well.'" Tommy (having secured the sovereign): "But how about catching a flea, Grandpa?" (Grandpapa chuckles, and doubles the tip)

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SOCIETY.

QUEEN VICTORIA sleeps every night of the year with the windows of her bedroom slightly open.

SOPHIA, Crown Princess of Greece, is astonishing and delighting the Athenians with her artistic talent, which she doubtless inherits from her accomplished mother.

It is a singular fact that the wife of the inventor of the telegraph and the wife of the inventor of the telephone were both deaf-mutes.

The fashion of quite long sleeves having returned, two-buttoned gloves are coming back.

There is a tendency toward the revival of frills of lace falling deep over the hand from the very long sleeves now worn.

A WELL KNOWN author who prefers the night for literary work has a custom of closing the blinds and lighting the gas when he is obliged to work in the daytime.

THE King of Sweden has made good his title to rank as the most prolific of Royal authors. His poetical and prose works, just published, fill four bulky volumes, and in the last, which is devoted to speeches, may be found specimens of his oratorical powers in Norwegian, Swedish, French, and English.

SHOES are getting around again to the Chinese pointed toe. For walking, boots have returned into fashion, the top part being of kid, and the toes of varnished leather. Shoes are made in the same way. For evening and home wear, tiny slippers with a little bow in the front are worn.

HER Majesty has given up her habit of always standing after dinner in the gallery at Windsor, and as soon as she gets into the drawing-room her chair is brought, and she sits down, as she cannot, from her lameness, stand for any length of time. It is a great change to every one about her, for now the rule is relaxed with many people, and those who are near the Queen, or who may be speaking to her, sit down as well.

NO inducement could persuade Adeline Patti to sing into a phonograph, yet she was outwitted by one of Edison's agents during her recent engagement in San Francisco. The agent placed an instrument under the stage, among the gaspipes; and one day, while she was singing, "Home, Sweet Home," and other ballads, the tones of her matchless voice were transferred, without her consent or knowledge, to a waxen cylinder.

THE unveiling of the equestrian statue of H.R.H. the late Prince Consort was a most imposing ceremony, and one which drew the hearts of all present towards the widowed Sovereign, as at the moment of unveiling Her Majesty was seen to be deeply affected. Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales quietly and with true sympathy stepped forward and induced the Queen to sit down, putting her chair nearer, and in all respects showing love and respect for her august mother-in-law.

A RECENT fad is to wear perfumed shoes. Many ladies favour the russet leather shoe on this account. As the genuine russet leather is quite expensive, some makers have adopted the plan of sprinkling orris-root powder, in which is sifted a favourite sachet, between the leather and the lining of their patrons' shoes. The material for the quarter which extends around the toe, forming a border to the vamp, is pearl-coloured buckskin bound with narrow silk ribbon to match the colour of the buckskin as nearly as possible. Pearl-coloured silk is also used for stitching. The vamp is pearl-coloured dull kid crossed by narrow, flat silk braid, pink in colour, and stitched on each edge. The contrast in colours is enough to give a rich dressy appearance without being so decided as to offend taste or mar the harmony by strong contrast.

STATISTICS.

OF every 1,000,000 people in the world 800 are blind.

AT the present time a penny on the Income Tax yields £2,200,000, as compared with £800,000 which Sir R. Peel estimated in 1844.

THUNDERSTORMS are more frequent in Java than in any other part of the globe. On an average they occur in the island on 97 days of the year. In England the average marks thunderstorms on about seven days in the year—only half the number recorded in France.

IN London, the places of amusement number about 550 or 600, including 450 music halls. The capital invested in London places of amusement is little short of £4,000,000, without reckoning places like the Crystal Palace, Albert Hall, &c. Direct employment is given to about 150,000 people, beside indirect employment to a host of tradesmen and workpeople. The London theatres, music halls, and concert halls have accommodation for about 500,000 sightseers.

GEMS.

HE that will put eternity and the world before him will invariably find, as he contemplates, that the former will grow greater and the latter less.

THAT the roses of pleasure seldom last long enough to adorn the brow of those who pluck them. That a man who cannot mind his own business is not to be trusted with the business of others.

ANGER is the most impotent passion that accompanies the mind of man; it effects nothing it goes about, and hurts the man who is possessed by it more than any others against whom it is directed.

HE who does the best he can is always improving. His best of yesterday is outdone to-day, and his best of to-day will be outdone to-morrow. It is this steady progress, no matter from what point it starts, that forms the chief element of all greatness and goodness.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

A PLAN to keep asparagus is to select the finest heads and dry them. When wanted for the table put them in hot water, and then boil for a few minutes. By this simple process the plants swell considerably, and it will be found very tender and finely flavoured.

SOFT PUDDINGS.—One cup of chopped raisins, two cups suet, one of sweet milk, two-thirds cup of treacle, one teaspoonful of soda, four cups of flour, spice to taste. Steam two hours; to be eaten with sauce. Very nice. Half of this makes enough for six persons.

SALLY LUNN.—Rub one-half cup of butter into two cups of flour into which two teaspoonfuls of cream tartar have been sifted. Mix in three tablespoonfuls of sugar, one-half teaspoonful of salt, add two eggs and two cups of milk with one teaspoonful of soda dissolved in the milk. Bake in long tin in a quick oven twenty minutes. Cut into squares, first dipping the knife-blade in hot water and drying it.

SNOW CAKE.—One and one-half cups of flour, one-half cup of butter, one-half cup of milk, whites of four eggs, one cup of fine white sugar. Beat together the sugar and butter, add the milk and one cup of flour; then the half cup of flour into which two scant teaspoonfuls of baking powder have been mixed; lastly, add the whites of the eggs beaten stiff, and some citron cut fine. Flavour with lemon or almond.

MISCELLANEOUS.

ONE-SEVENTH of the coal mined is lost from being broken up too fine to be burned with profit.

OUR friend the present Shah is the first Sovereign of Persia who has left his dominions in 2,350 years.

A VIENNA baker is advertising his business by putting a gold ducat in one loaf out of every thousand that he bakes.

A HORSE walking at a smart pace strikes the ground with a force equal to a ton every time he puts down his fore-foot.

THE hatters of Europe have just celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of the introduction of the silk stove-pipe hat.

THE Japanese Government has sent two engineers to Berlin to study the telephone system, with a view of establishing a line in Japan.

WHY is the sea green? Because of the innumerable animal forms which inhabit it. As many as 128 of these forms have been found in a single cubic inch of water.

AN oculist declares that only one pair of eyes in every fifteen are without flaw or failing—perfect. Even that, however, is more than can be said for eye-glasses.

DIETHYLSULPHONEDIMETHYLMETHANE is the correct name of the drug generally spoken of as sulphonal. It has a second cousin, so to speak, named dimethylsulphonedimethylmethane.

AN indication of the spread of English as a language is given by the fact that it has just been chosen for use in the recording of important treaty engagements between Russia and China.

THE first forgery of Bank of England notes was made nearly a century and a half ago, but the notes in this case never got into circulation owing to the treachery of one of the artists.

THE commonest of beetles is in proportion to its size six times stronger than the horse, and an eminent naturalist tells us that if the elephant were as strong for its size as a stag-beetle is, it would be able to tear up the stoutest trees and knock down mountains.

"STRANGER'S COLD" is a phenomenon to which several remote populations are subject. The presence of strangers among the descendants of the Bounty mutineers on Norfolk Island is almost invariably accompanied by an epidemic of influenza among the inhabitants.

THERE are no less than 130 patent washing machines in the market, and yet not one of them has succeeded in holding his own against the old-fashioned way and good enough way invented by Eve in the garden of Eden. It's hard on the knuckles, but it never leaves the clothes streaked.

THE Japanese are ardent lovers of nature. Outside of Atrocida, I know of no other land whose people hang verses on the trees in honour of their beauty; where families travel far before the dawn to see the first light touch the new buds. Where else do the newspapers announce the spring openings of the blossoms?

THE huge number of synonyms for money illustrates remarkably well the variety of sources from which our slang words are recruited, and the remarkable appositeness of some of them. We may talk of our money in scores of ways, among which are, for instance, "the actual," "the needful," or "the where-withal," "beans," "blunt," "tin," or "brass"; "chips," "dibs," or "pieces," "dust," "chink," or "shot"; "shackles," "spundulics," or "dollars"; "stamps," "feathers," or "palm oil," which last is such an obviously appropriate name of it that "skin plaster" seems feeble by comparison; and the young but widely popular "coof," "coof-bird," and "coof-tieh," "inbelle and lanne."

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

CYCLIST.—The distance from John o' Groats to Land's End, as the crow flies, is 608 miles.

PARQUAR.—You must employ a solicitor. It will take some months to get the case into court.

TROUBLED.—The father is not responsible for windows broken by his son, but the son may be prosecuted.

HEIR.—The eldest son takes all the freehold property; the rest is equally divided amongst all the children.

ANTRIM.—June is from June, the patron of marriage, and is, therefore, the favourite month for weddings.

D. D.—A person may carry and use a gun in his own garden closely adjoining the house without a license.

PHILLIPS.—The last person executed in England for attempted murder was Martin Doyle, on 27th August, 1861.

LEO.—A geographical mile is the same on the sea and land. Sea is as much a matter of the earth's surface as land is.

PUBLICAN.—An action can be brought against you for damages if you refuse to supply a sober customer during proper hours.

ANXIOUS.—The landlord cannot distrain for rent after you have left his house, but he can sue for it in the County Court.

TENANT.—A mortgagee in possession is entitled to execute reasonable repairs, and to charge them against the mortgagor.

OLD STORY.—The Tichborne claimant was found guilty of perjury, and sentenced to penal servitude for fourteen years.

LOVER OF SPORT.—If the game falls in another man's land it belongs to the shooter, but he will commit a trespass in fetching it.

JEM (Punney).—The Registrar-General's statistics of mortality are for "Greater London," which includes about 4,000,000 people.

ADA.—Inflamed eyes are often relieved by cutting a large potato in two, scooping out the inside, and binding over the feverish lids.

ARGUMENT.—A lad of fourteen years may be publicly hanged for that matter. The "statutes" place no limit to the age of gallows victims.

H. F.—You would say The Right Hon. H. Matthews, Secretary for Home Department, Sir. He is a member of Cabinet, therefore Right Honorable.

Q. Q.—Wills made in the western division of Suffolk (which includes Bury St. Edmunds) are proved at the Probate Registry at Bury St. Edmunds.

MINNIE BARD.—An affiliation summons can be taken out within twelve months of the last payment made on behalf of the child by the alleged father.

PALE ANKIE.—The Turkish bath may quicken the skin's action, and in that way aid your digestion, but the remedy is not always an advisable one.

G. C.—1. The Emperor Nero died by his own hand on June 9, 66. **2.** There were in the United States naval service in 1889 about 7,500 enlisted men and 750 boys.

INQUIRER.—A rate-collector is not disqualified from sitting on a School Board. We cannot express an opinion as to whether he is a proper person to select.

M. B.—When hoarse speak as little as possible until the hoarseness has disappeared, else the voice may be permanently lost or difficulties of the throat be produced.

WANTS TO KNOW.—Good Friday was denominated Long Friday by the Saxons forefathers on account of the great length of the offices observed and fastings enjoined on that day.

UGHER.—There are processes of law by which a patent right can be reached by creditors of the patentee. But the creditors must consult a lawyer in order to accomplish such a purpose.

BOB.—Sir Francis Drake sailed from Plymouth, England, November 13, 1577, and sailing round the globe, returned to England, after numerous perilous adventures, November 3, 1580.

EMIGRANT.—There are six colonies in Australia, five on the Continent, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, and Western Australia, and one, Tasmania, is a separate island.

LEARNER.—Two dissimilar metals, when exposed to the acid of the mouth, will produce a current of electricity, but of very slight strength. The cause of your toothache is more probably neuralgia.

DICK.—The most ancient remains of writing which have been transmitted to us are upon hard substances, such as stones and metals, used by the ancients for edicts and matters of public notoriety.

WHITE WING.—1. You write a very legible hand. Practice will improve it. **2.** Sleep in gloves, and pay great attention to your hands. **3.** The last question is a little obscure. What do you mean by "a book on monarchoa"?

AMBITIOUS.—Be assured you will never learn anything of a broker's business from books. You must either go about to auction sales and keep your eyes open so as to learn on what terms business is done, or you must go in partnership with a man in the line. There is no trade requiring greater stock of shrewdness.

PARTY JANE.—This application has been used with some effect: Scrape horse-radish into a cup of sour milk, let the mixture stand for twelve hours, and then strain, apply to the freckles three or four times daily.

TIERD.—We would rather not advise. You may have done yourself serious injury by your overstudy, and it is necessary that a skilled medical man should examine you to ascertain the exact nature of your complaint.

GERMAN LANS.—The light-coloured kind of artificial hair come from Germany, except the drab and ash shades, which are furnished by Sweden. Nearly all the various shades of dark hair are imported from France.

RESTLESS.—There are no bleachfields near Southampton, nor can we advise you to go there, except you have friends likely to put you in the way of a situation. It is a busy shipping port, not a manufacturing town.

W. S. H.—1. King William IV. died on the 20th of June, 1837. **2.** The storm you allude to is probably the great gale of October 23th, 1838. There was another equally destructive on the 6th and 7th of January, 1839.

R. L.—The phrase "Drunk as a lord" arose, it is said, out of an old proverb, "Drunk as a beggar," and we are told that it was altered owing to the vice of drunkenness prevailing more among the nobility of late years.

HARD WORK.—A small potato with one end sliced off is excellent to rub steel knives with, as the juices of the potato exudes in just sufficient quantity to keep the bath brick damp and the steel moist during the scouring process.

LAWFUL.—A father is not bound to keep a son able to work to earn his own living, but who refuses to do so; but if the son becomes chargeable to the parish, then the father may be summoned to contribute towards his support while so chargeable.

WORTH WHILE.

It is easy enough to be pleasant,
When life flows by like a song,
But the man worth while is one who will smile
When everything goes dead wrong.
For the test of the heart is trouble,
And it always comes with the years,
And the smile that is worth the praises of earth
Is the smile that shines through tears.

It is easy enough to be prudent,
When nothing tempts you to stray,
When without or within no voice of sin
Is luring your soul away.
But it's only a negative virtue
Until it is tried by fire,
And the life that is worth the honour of earth
Is the one that resists desire.

By the cynic, the sad, the fallen,
Who had no strength for the strife,
The world's highway is cumbered to-day,
They make up the item of life.
But the virtue that conquers passion,
And the sorrow that hides in a smile,
It is these that are worth the homage of earth,
For we find them but once in a while.

E. W.

SCHOOLBOY.—It was after the battle of Zela, in which Julius Cæsar defeated Pharnaces, King of Pontus, son of Mithridates, that Cæsar in announcing his victory sent his famous despatch to the Senate of Rome in these words, "I came, I saw, I conquered."

V. Z.—Yes, you have good grounds of an action for damages. If the man did not mean to keep faith with you he should have answered your repeated letters in time to let you get goods to meet your orders elsewhere. He has inflicted undoubted loss upon you, and must pay for it.

DOLLIE.—1. We have no experience of such an extremely unpleasant process as you mention. There is nothing so good for the skin as soap and water. **2.** Nothing will make the complexion clear if the health is not good. **3.** Arnica is as good and quick as anything for healing a cut.

IGNORANT.—1. George III. ruled England from 1760 to 1820, a period of sixty years. No English reign has yet equalled his in length. **2.** Queen Victoria has had five daughters and four sons. She had up to January 1, 1890, a total of fifty-six children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, of whom forty-eight are living.

OLD MAN.—Mr. Gladstone has never received the pension to which he is entitled. Lord Beaconsfield, when he was Mr. Disraeli, received his pension. There is no rule about the matter; but few Ex-Ministers receive the pension, it being a point of honour for persons with sufficient private resources not to receive it.

J. BETHUNE.—In answer to your question and similar ones from about a dozen other correspondents, we would say that freckles are usually constitutional, appearing in childhood and lasting through life. Occasionally they are caused by exposure to sun and wind, in which case they disappear to an extent when the cause is removed. It is not often possible to lessen to any great extent the conspicuousness of permanent freckles. The following application, however, sometimes has some effect: One drachm of muriatic acid, half-a-pint of rain-water, half-a-teaspoonful of spirits of lavender; these ingredients should be well mixed and applied three or four times a day to the freckles with a camel-hair pencil of a bit of linen.

M. B. R.—The first decisive victory of Alexander the Great over the Persians was achieved at Granicus, in ancient geography a small river of Asia Minor, rising north-west of Mount Ida, and emptying into the Propontis after a north-east course of fifty or sixty miles.

R. T.—The White Sea is a large gulf or branch of the Arctic Ocean, which extends far into north-west Russia. In shape it is nearly semi-circular. The white whale, or white fish of the whalers, abound there. Its area is estimated at 44,000 square miles. It first became known to English navigators in 1553. Its only large port is Archangel at the mouth of the Dwina River.

VERA.—Nothing will restore colour to the hair when once it is naturally bleached. You may dye it, but thereby injure its texture, and it becomes harsh and coarse, and it looks artificial. On no account do anything of the sort, but keep it, whatever be its colour, in good condition by washing, brushing, and proper attention.

NORTH OF THE TWEED.—Strontian is a hamlet of Scotland on an arm of the sea called Loch Sunart. It is noted for its mines of lead and strontian, which metal is named from the place. The metal is pronounced as if spelled stron-ah-an, the accent on the first syllable. By the people of the vicinity the hamlet is called strontee-an, the accent on the second syllable.

WORRIED ANNIE.—It would be unwise for you to attempt to interfere with nature in the matter. If the change is purely a natural process, any effort to neutralise it would be liable to result disastrously, and to injure either the child's scalp or her general health. Most of the nostrums advertised to bleach the hair contain lead in some form, and injure the hair follicles.

SCHOOLGIRL.—During winter at Spitzbergen, in the Arctic Ocean, to which you refer, the sun remains for four months below the horizon, but at so short a distance from it that in every twenty-four hours the darkness is relieved for about six hours by a faint twilight and the occasional brilliant light of the aurora borealis. The moon and stars shine with extraordinary brightness. Winter begins at the end of September.

LIZBETH.—To prepare macaroni with cheese, take as much macaroni as will fill an ordinary baking-dish; boil it in water two hours; drain it off, and add one pint of cream or milk, one tablespoonful of butter, one of biscuit dust, and one of grated cheese. Mix it well before putting it into the dish; cover it with the grated cheese and biscuit dust, and keep it in the oven until browned on the top.

AMBLESIDE.—The diamond is the most valuable of the precious stones, and especially in the larger and heavier stones, the value of which is ascertained by multiplying the square of the weight in carats by the price per carat. Thus, assuming the price of the carat to be £13, a diamond weighing four-and-a-half carats would be worth £231, unless it have some exceptional quality, as the "Hope" diamond, of a rare blue colour, which, though only of this weight, is valued at £25,000.

REBECCA L.—Emin Pasha is an Austrian, whose real name, as before stated, is Schnitzer, and who was born in Appeln. After studying medicine at Breslau, Berlin, and Königsberg, he was appointed, in 1868, a surgeon in the Turkish army. Afterwards he was sent to Egypt, and was appointed surgeon-general of the army by General Gordon. In 1878 he was made Governor-General of the Equatorial Province of Sudan, with the title of Bey. He was subsequently made Pasha.

OLD READER.—What is told of Solomon's wealth is only in a general way. He inherited a full treasury and built the famous temple, which is estimated to have cost \$77,321,965,636; was interested in naval expeditions to the distant land of Ophir, which brought back precious gems and gold, and enabled him to erect, besides the temple, the most gorgeous structures. His court was noted for its splendour, and his army for its rare horses and magnificent chariots. Of his aggregate riches we have no knowledge. Nor can it be ascertained with any degree of positiveness who was or is the richest man in the world, or even in the United States.

J. L. G.—There are two very different kinds of lovers, to wit: the lover who loves for his or her own sake, and the lover who loves for the sake of the one beloved. The love of the first kind is a selfish passion, which demands its own gratification irrespective of the welfare of its object; while that of the other kind is self-sacrificing and seeks only, or at least chiefly, the happiness and well-being of the one beloved. It is lovers of the first kind who bring suits for breach of promise of marriage, and make an outcry when they are jilted, and do other things which make the public laugh at them. You must be your own judge as to which class it is that you belong.

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